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WAR PICTURE LIBRARY

No 289

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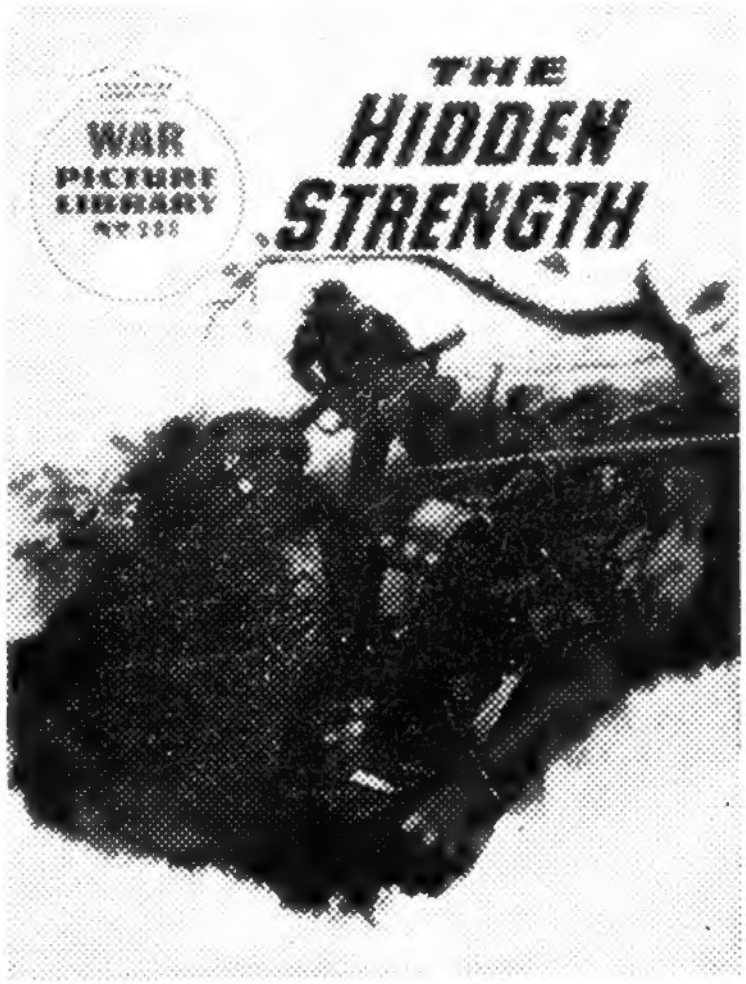
# LAST CAMPAIGN

## ALSO ON SALE NOW
## FOR WAR THRILLS...ACTION...DRAMA...

# WAR PICTURE LIBRARY

**No. 288—THE HIDDEN STRENGTH**




He had a cool brand of courage that withstood the savagery of jungle fighting and the heartbreaking shock of defeat.

**No. 290—FINLAY'S FURIES**

The two regiments had been feuding for years—but in the heat of battle, a bond of comradeship was welded between them.

**ALSO ON SALE NOW :—**

**No. 291—MISSION FOR HEROES**

Next month's **FOUR** thrilling **WAR PICTURE LIBRARY** issues, on sale 4th June, are :—

**No. 292—UNDAUNTED**
**No. 293—THE LIONHEARTS**
**No. 294—FLOATING BOMB**
**No. 295—OPERATION DOOMSDAY**

# LAST CAMPAIGN

COLONEL CLIVE DOUGLAS WYNNHAMMOND, V.C. RESPONDED TO THE CALL TO ARMS LIKE A WAR-HORSE TO THE BRASSY NOTES OF A BUGLE. HE WAS A BORN SOLDIER.

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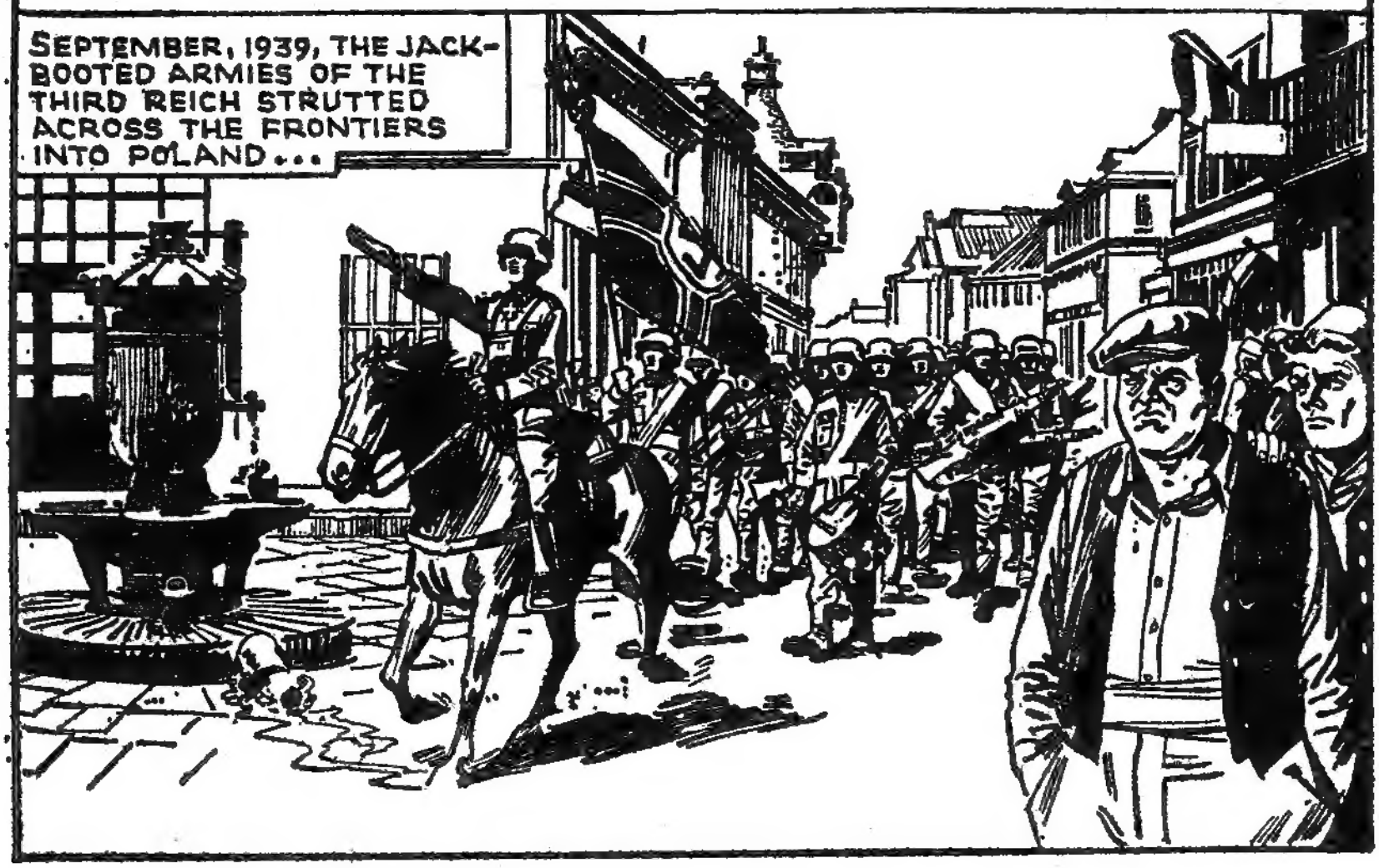
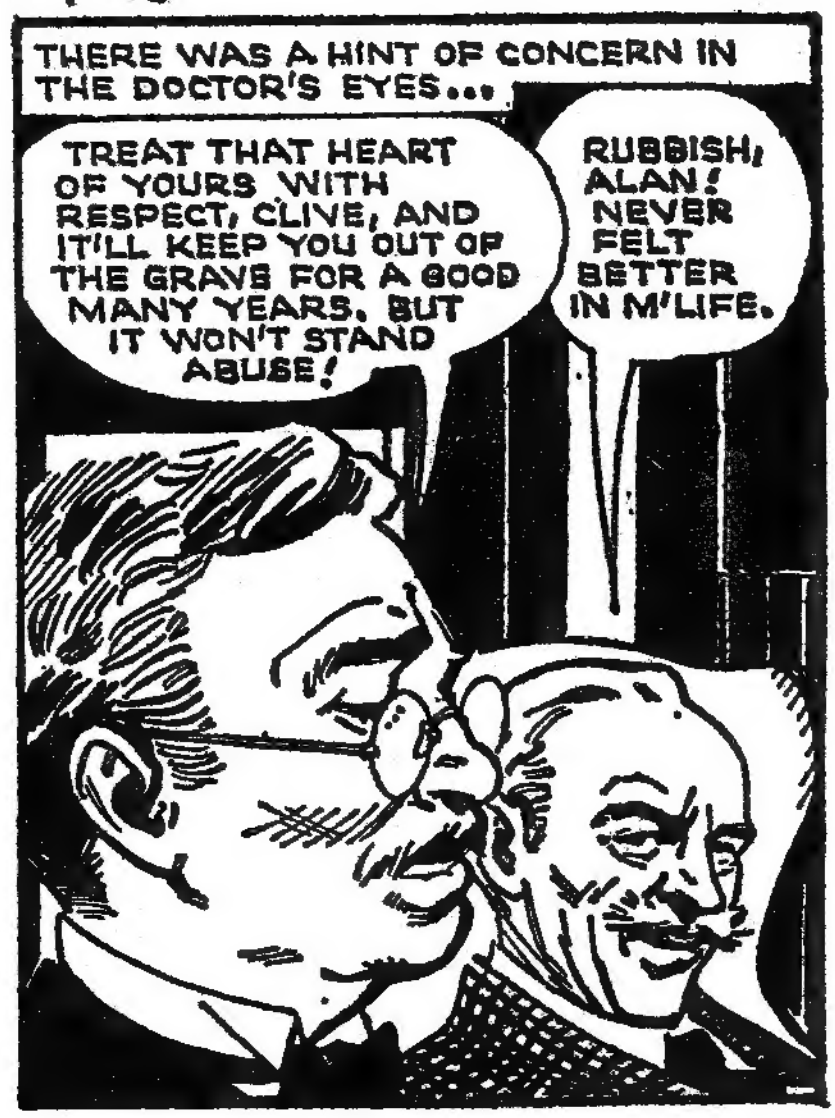
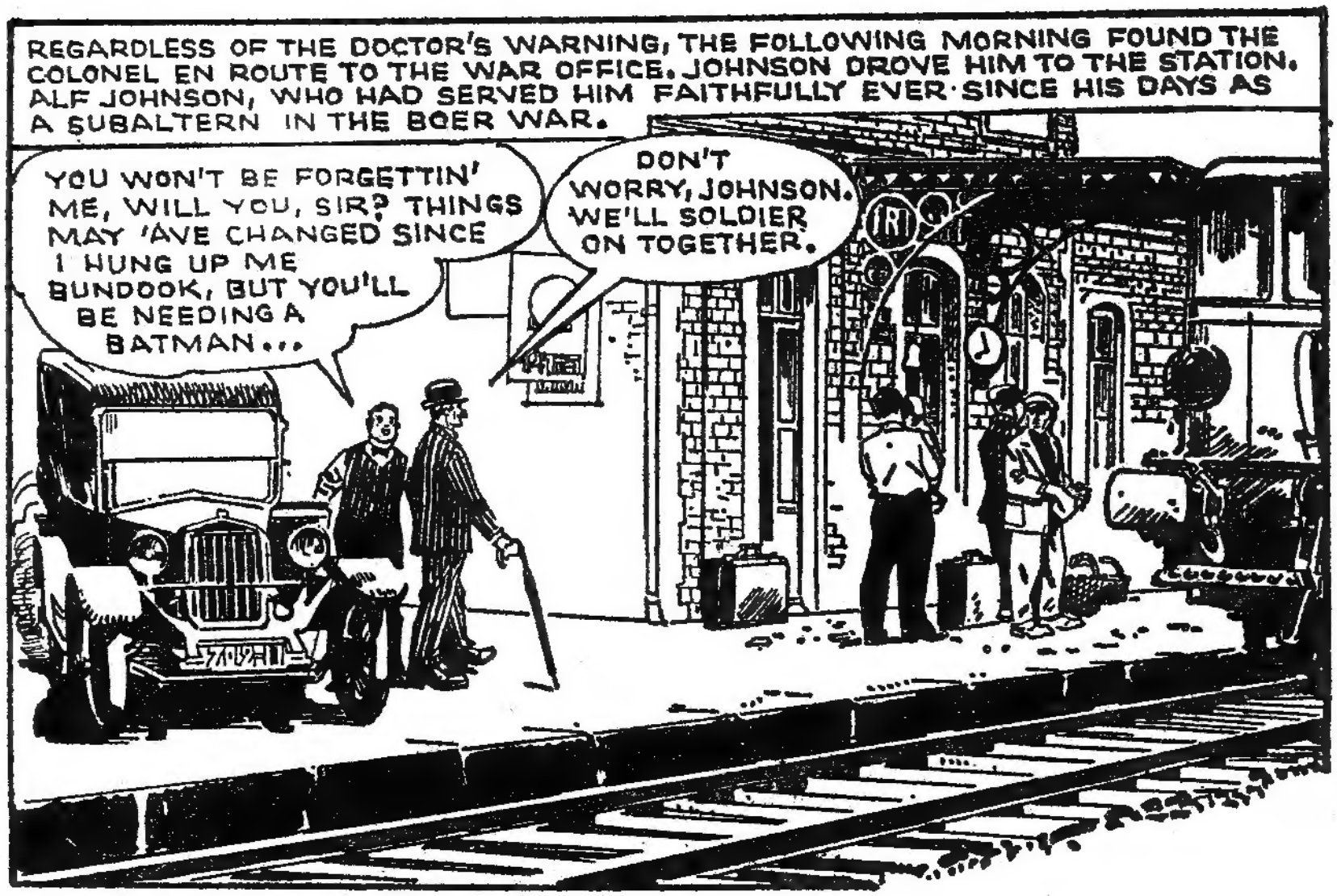
W.P.L.—289

# Chapter 1. NIGHT OF BATTLE



ALAN CHARTERIS HAD BEEN BOTH DOCTOR AND FRIEND TO COLONEL WYNNHAMMOND SINCE THE PEPPERY OLD WARRIOR HAD RETIRED FROM THE ARMY.
YOU DON'T THINK THAT AT OUR AGE WE MIGHT SIT THIS WAR OUT, CLIVE?
SIT IT OUT! I'M STILL ON THE RESERVE LIST, YOU KNOW.


THERE WAS A HINT OF CONCERN IN THE DOCTOR'S EYES...
TREAT THAT HEART OF YOURS WITH RESPECT, CLIVE, AND IT'LL KEEP YOU OUT OF THE GRAVE FOR A GOOD MANY YEARS. BUT IT WON'T STAND ABUSE!
RUBBISH, ALAN! NEVER FELT BETTER IN M'LIFE.

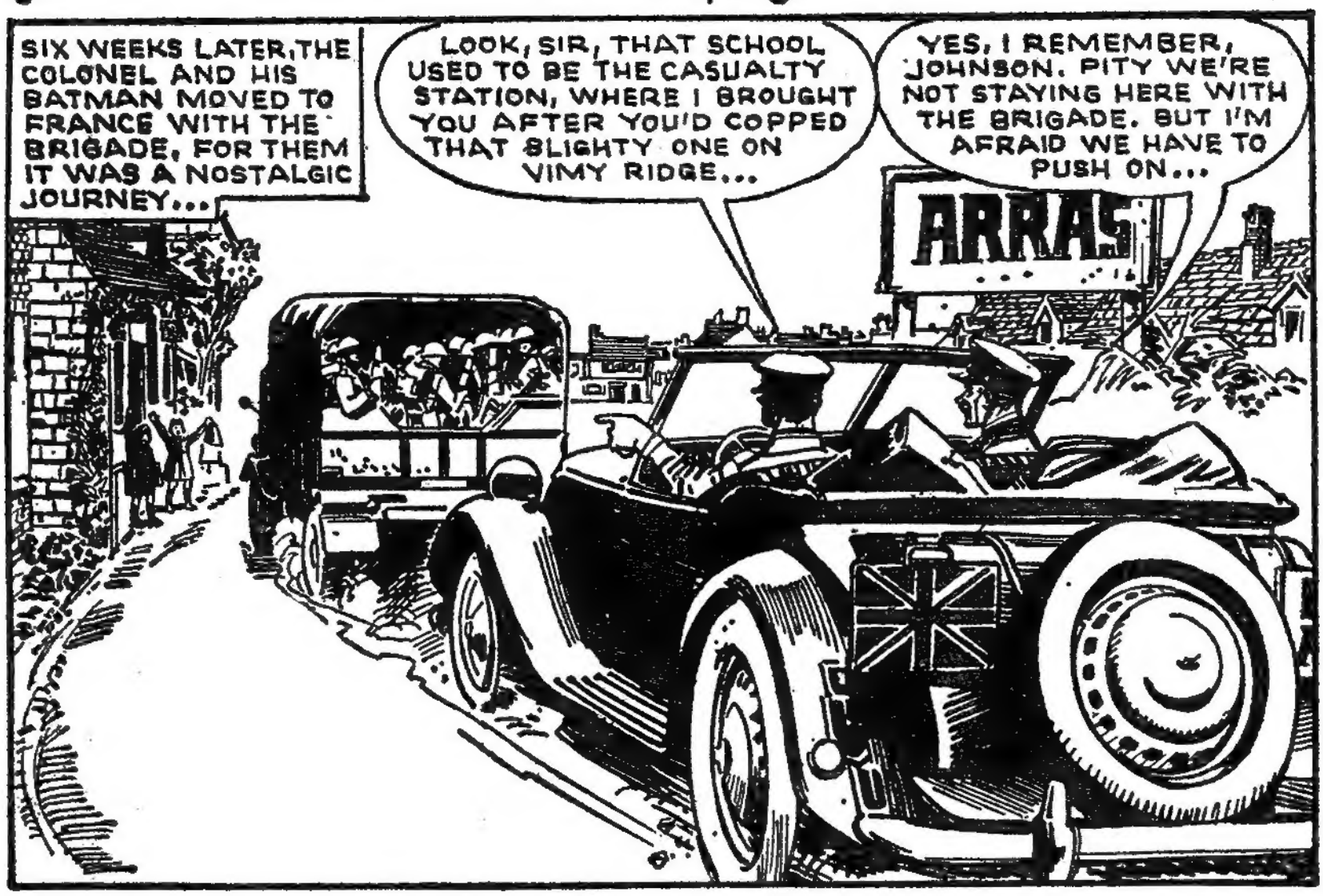

REGARDLESS OF THE DOCTOR'S WARNING, THE FOLLOWING MORNING FOUND THE COLONEL EN ROUTE TO THE WAR OFFICE. JOHNSON DROVE HIM TO THE STATION. ALF JOHNSON, WHO HAD SERVED HIM FAITHFULLY EVER SINCE HIS DAYS AS A SUBALTERN IN THE BOER WAR.
YOU WON'T BE FORGETTIN' ME, WILL YOU, SIR? THINGS MAY 'AVE CHANGED SINCE I HUNG UP ME BUNDOOK, BUT YOU'LL BE NEEDING A BATMAN...
DON'T WORRY, JOHNSON. WE'LL SOLDIER ON TOGETHER.

LATER THAT SAME DAY, BRIGADIER GREYLAND RECEIVED A TELEPHONE CALL FROM THE WAR OFFICE.
G.O.C. HERE, GREYLAND. I'M SENDING COLONEL WYNNHAMMOND TO JOIN YOUR BRIGADE BEFORE YOU MOVE TO FRANCE.
COLONEL WYNNHAMMOND! WITH DUE RESPECT, SIR, ISN'T HE CRACKING ON IN YEARS FOR ACTIVE SERVICE?

THE GENERAL WAS NOT A MAN WHO TOOK KINDLY TO SUBORDINATES WHO QUESTIONED HIS ORDERS...
YOU HEARD MY ORDERS, GREYLAND! COLONEL WYNNHAMMOND SHOULD BE OF CONSIDERABLE ASSISTANCE TO YOU.
VERY GOOD, SIR!

TROUBLE, SIR?
OLD WYNNHAMMOND'S PULLED STRINGS AND GOT HIMSELF ATTACHED TO US. HE'S BEEN A FINE SOLDIER IN HIS DAY. V.C. IN THE BOER WAR AND THE M.C. IN FLANDERS. BUT DASH IT—THIS IS A YOUNG MAN'S WAR!

DESPITE HIS MISGIVINGS, THE BRIGADIER FELT A STRONG ADMIRATION FOR THE VIGOROUS OLD SOLDIER.
GRAND TO BE BACK IN THE SERVICE, BRIGADIER. WHAT UNIT WILL I BE COMMANDING?
IT'S—ER— GOOD TO HAVE YOU WITH US, COLONEL. ACTUALLY I HAVEN'T A FIGHTING COMMAND AVAILABLE JUST NOW...


SIX WEEKS LATER, THE COLONEL AND HIS BATMAN MOVED TO FRANCE WITH THE BRIGADE, FOR THEM IT WAS A NOSTALGIC JOURNEY...
LOOK, SIR, THAT SCHOOL USED TO BE THE CASUALTY STATION, WHERE I BROUGHT YOU AFTER YOU'D COPPED THAT SLIGHTY ONE ON VIMY RIDGE...
YES, I REMEMBER, JOHNSON. PITY WE'RE NOT STAYING HERE WITH THE BRIGADE. BUT I'M AFRAID WE HAVE TO PUSH ON...
ARRAS

THE COLONEL CONTINUED HIS JOURNEY TO TAKE UP HIS LIAISON DUTIES WITH A CHASSEUR REGIMENT IN THE MAGINOT LINE.
CLIVE! AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, IT IS GOOD TO SEE YOU, MON AMI...
AND TO SEE YOU, PAUL. A YOUNG PUP OF A BRIGADIER HAS HAD ME POSTED HERE TO KEEP ME OUT OF THE WAY, BUT WE'LL SHOW HIM, OLD SOLDIERS NEVER DIE, EH?

IN THOSE EARLY DAYS OF WAR AN UNEASY TRUCE HUNG OVER THE WESTERN FRONT...
WHY DO WE NOT ATTACK? MUST WE RATTLE SABRES BEHIND THE BARBED WIRE FOREVER?
PATIENCE, PAUL, THERE'LL BE AN OFFENSIVE SOON ENOUGH.

THE GREY MONTHS OF WINTER GAVE WAY TO SPRING, AND STILL THE GUNS LAY SILENT ALONG THE FRONT.
CHECKMATE, I THINK, PAUL. YOU MADE THE SAME TACTICAL ERROR AS YOU DID AT HILL FIFTY.
TACTICS! WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF TACTICS?
PARDONNEZ, MOI, MON COLONEL. AN URGENT MESSAGE FROM HEADQUARTERS.

IT WAS MAY 1940. SUDDENLY THE FRONT HAD EXPLODED INTO VIOLENCE. THE GERMANS HAD BROKEN THROUGH AT SEDAN AND SENT THEIR PANZER DIVISIONS LUNGING INTO FRANCE.
FORWARD! WE DRIVE TO THE CHANNEL!

OUTSIDE ARRAS, BRIGADIER GREYLAND'S BATTALIONS STOOD FULL IN THE PATH OF THE GERMAN BLITZKREIG.
THE BELGIANS HAVE CRACKED AND THE FRONT'S FOLDING UP FAST. DIV. HAS ORDERED US TO FALL BACK TO CALAIS. I'M COUNTING ON YOUR FUSILIERS TO COVER OUR WITHDRAWAL.
WHEN JERRY SHOWS UP HE'LL FIND HE'S TANGLED WITH A PORCUPINE, SIR.

THE BATTALION SHOOK OUT TO A DEFENCE POSITION ACROSS A BROAD FRONT. TWO RIFLE COMPANIES FORWARD, TWO IN RESERVE.
THINK THEY'LL KEEP US WAITING LONG, SIR?
ACCORDING TO THE SIT. REP., A JERRY DIVISION COULD SHOW UP ANY TIME.
PUT YOUR BACKS INTO IT, LADS! YOU'LL BE NEEDING EVERY INCH OF COVER.

THE FUSILIERS SETTLED DOWN TO AN UNEASY NIGHT WATCH. JUST BEFORE MIDNIGHT...
IT'S THE HUN! STAND TO!

RANKS OF SCUTTLE-HELMETED FIGURES WERE MOVING REMORSELESSLY TOWARDS THE BRITISH LINE...
ENEMY IN FRONT, SIGHTS DOWN — RAPID FIRE!

UNDER THAT FIRST VICIOUS HAIL OF LEAD THE GERMANS MELTED OUT OF SIGHT.
ACH, THE ENGLANDER SWINE ARE THICK ON THE GROUND! SEND FOR PANZER SUPPORT, FELDWEBEL.
JAWOHL, HERR LEUTNANT.

THE FIRING EASED TO SPORADIC BURSTS. LONG, TENSION-PACKED MINUTES CRAWLED BY. THEN CAME THE OMINOUS GRINDING OF STEEL TRACKS.
DON'T LET 'EM RATTLE YOU, LADS. TAKE YOUR TIME AND BELT 'EM WHERE IT HURTS!

THREE OF THE GERMAN TANKS NEVER MADE IT ACROSS THE KILLING ZONE OF THE BRITISH GUNS...

BUT OTHERS PENETRATED THE BRITISH LINES AND THE FUSILIERS FOUGHT NIGHTMARE BATTLES AT CLOSE QUARTERS...
THE END OF THE RUN, JERRY! HERE'S THE PAY-OFF!

IN THE MAIN THE FUSILIERS WERE A YOUNG UNTRIED BATTALION, BUT THEY FOUGHT MAGNIFICENTLY THAT NIGHT.
COME ON! COME ON, THE DIE-HARDS!

THREE TIMES IN THOSE LONG HOURS OF DARKNESS THE GERMANS CAME ACROSS THAT BLOOD-SOAKED SOIL—AND THREE TIMES THEY WERE DRIVEN BACK WITH BAYONET AND GRENADE.
PILE INTO 'EM, MEN!

BUT AFTER EACH ATTACK THERE WERE FEWER MEN TO ANSWER THE ROLL CALL.
HE'S GONE, SARGE. HOW—HOW LONG CAN WE LAST?
NOT LONG, KID! ONE WAY OR THE OTHER!

THE SAME THOUGHTS WERE RUNNING THROUGH THE MIND OF COLONEL GEOFFREY TAYLOR AS HE WATCHED THE BATTALION DYING ON ITS FEET.
WE CAN'T HOLD OUT MUCH AFTER FIRST LIGHT.
WE DON'T HAVE TO, SIR. THIS ORDER HAS JUST COME THROUGH...

IN MANY POSITIONS ONLY A HANDFUL OF GAUNT-FACED MEN REMAINED TO WITHDRAW.
CORPORAL MURPHY, SPIKE THAT GUN AND GET YOUR SECTION READY TO PULL OUT!
ME SECTION, SOR! SURE IT'S ONLY MESELF AND PATRICK HERE THAT'S BEEN HOLDING OFF THE DEVIL AND HIS LEGIONS THIS LAST HOUR OR MORE.

THE BATTALION'S RANKS HAD BEEN DESPERATELY THINNED BUT THE GERMANS TOO HAD SUFFERED TERRIBLE CASUALTIES. THE BATTALION DISENGAGED, AND STARTED ON THE LONG HAUL BACK TOWARD THE COAST.
COME ON, LADS, WE'VE GOT A LONG HIKE AHEAD OF US. PICK UP THE STEP THERE — LEFT — LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT!

BUT THERE WAS TO BE NO EASY ESCAPE FROM THE HOLOCAUST OF WAR. DAWN CAME—AND WITH IT THE LUFTWAFFE:

A BREN GUN WAS STILL HURLING PUNY DEFIANCE SKYWARD WHEN THE STUKAS CLAWED OUT OF THEIR SCREAMING DIVES.
AAGH!

THE COLONEL AND HIS SECOND-IN-COMMAND NEVER SURVIVED THAT ATTACK...

IT ONLY LEAVES YOUNG CAVENDISH TO TAKE COMMAND OF THE BATTALION, TURK.

HE'S OUT OF THE RUNNING WITH SHELL-SHOCK, SAR'-MAJOR. GUESS IF ANYONE'S GOING TO GET US OUT O' THIS MESS, IT'S YOU!

MERCIFULLY THE STUKAS DID NOT RETURN, BUT THERE WAS NO RESPITE FROM THE GRINDING AGONY OF THE MARCH.

YOU CAN'T PACK IN NOW, SON! ON YOUR FEET!

THE MORNING WAS WELL ADVANCED BY THE TIME THEY REACHED THE LITTLE TOWN OF CHATTILON.

TURN BACK, M'SIEU. THE ACCURSED BOCHE ALREADY HOLD THE COAST ROAD TO CALAIS.

JERRY MUST HAVE SWUNG ACROSS COUNTRY AHEAD OF US, SAR'-MAJOR.

# Chapter 2. THE LOST FUSILIERS

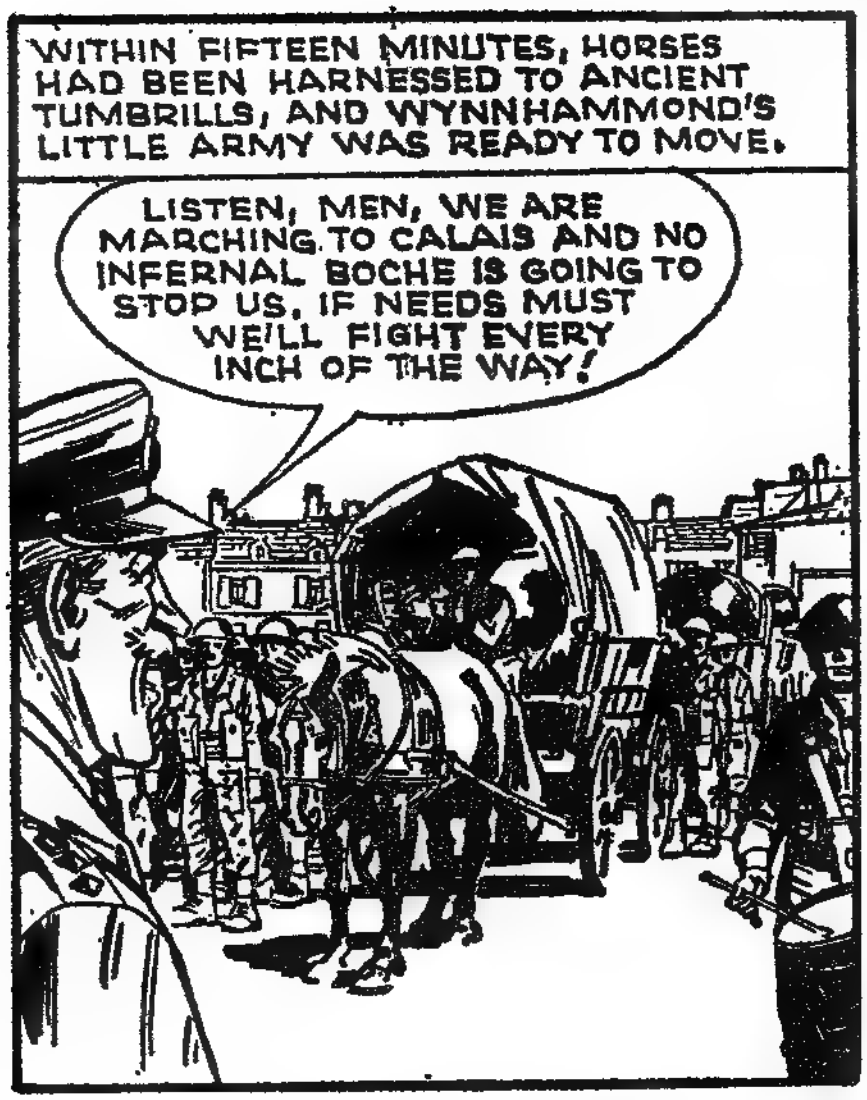
TWENTY MINUTES LATER, THE COLONEL ENTERED CHATTILON AND FOUND THE FUSILIERS.
GOOD GAD, WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS, SERGEANT-MAJOR? WHERE ARE YOUR OFFICERS, MAN?
DEAD, SIR – ALL DEAD! THE GOING'S BEEN PRETTY ROUGH THIS LAST TWENTY-FOUR HOURS. JERRY'S BLOCKING THE ROAD AHEAD, TOO!

THE COLONEL WAS NO STRANGER TO BATTLE FATIGUE. THERE WAS ONLY ONE THING THAT WOULD DRAG THESE MEN BACK TO THEIR FEET...
YOU HAVE MUSICIANS IN THE RANKS, SERGEANT-MAJOR?
ER, YES, SIR. MOST O' THE STRETCHER BEARERS ARE BANDSMEN, BUT...
GOOD! HAVE 'EM PARADED BY THE TIME I GET BACK.

AT THE COLONEL'S REQUEST, THE OLD FRENCHMAN LED HIM TO A SMALL MUSIC SHOP CLOSE BY THE SQUARE.
TAKE THESE BACK TO THE BATTALION, JOHNSON.
MERCI, M'SIEU, ET BON CHANCE.
LES ANGLAIS, THEY ARE MAD!

TEN MINUTES LATER, THE LITTLE MARKET SQUARE IN CHATTILON ECHOED TO THE BEAT OF DRUMS AND THE BLARING NOTE OF A BUGLE..
THAT'S THE FALL IN THEY'RE SOUNDING. COME ON, MATES!

MY OATH, SIR, YOU'VE DONE IT! YOU'VE GOT 'EM BACK ON THEIR FEET.
AND NOW THEY'RE GOING TO MARCH, SERGEANT-MAJOR. THERE'S A LIVERY OVER THERE. DETAIL MEN TO COLLECT HORSES AND FARM WAGONS FOR THE WOUNDED.


WITHIN FIFTEEN MINUTES, HORSES HAD BEEN HARNESSED TO ANCIENT TUMBRILLS, AND WYNNHAMMOND'S LITTLE ARMY WAS READY TO MOVE.
LISTEN, MEN, WE ARE MARCHING TO CALAIS AND NO INFERNAL BOCHE IS GOING TO STOP US. IF NEEDS MUST WE'LL FIGHT EVERY INCH OF THE WAY!

THE BATTALION STRUCK OUT ACROSS COUNTRY. WITH THE WISDOM OF AN OLD CAMPAIGNER, THE COLONEL THREW OUT SCOUTS AHEAD.
KEEP YOUR NAPPERS DOWN WHEN WE HIT THE CREST, LADS...

CAUTIOUSLY THE SCOUT MOVED UP TO THE SKYLINE...
LUMME! THAT FARM'S ROTTEN WIV' SQUAREHEADS, SARGE!
NO WAY ROUND 'EM! HANG ON HERE, I'D BEST GET THE COLONEL.

SPANDAUS, SIR! THEY'D CHEW US TO MINCEMEAT BEFORE WE'D COVERED TWO HUNDRED YARDS.
I AGREE, SERGEANT-MAJOR, BUT THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY OF KILLING THE CAT. EVER HEARD OF THE WOODEN HORSE OF TROY?

THE COLONEL GATHERED THE N.C.O.S FOR A BRIEFING...
WE'LL OFF-LOAD THE WOUNDED AND CONCEAL FIVE MEN UNDER HAY IN EACH WAGON. WITH LUCK THE BOCHE WILL MISTAKE US FOR FRENCH PEASANTS UNTIL WE'RE AT CLOSE QUARTERS...

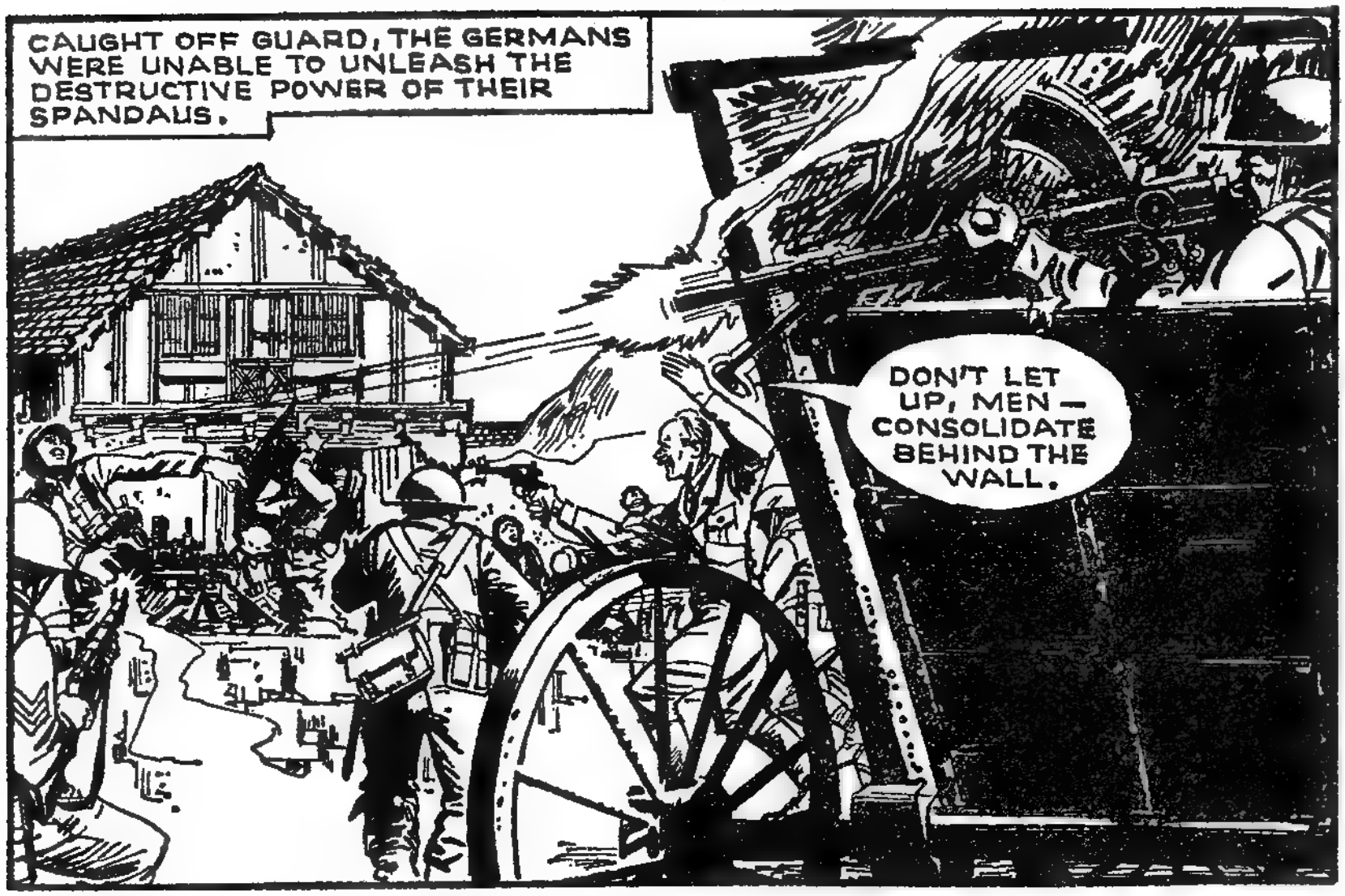
THE OLD BOY MAY BE CRACKING ON FOR A PENSION, BUT HE'S STILL AS CUNNING AS A FOX...
HE'S GOT THE MAGIC TOUCH, ALL RIGHT. THE LADS WOULD FOLLOW HIM TO HELL, IF NEEDS BE, ALL THE SAME, HE SHOULDN'T BE LEADING THE ATTACK, IT'S A JOB FOR A YOUNG MAN.

ALF JOHNSON SHARED THE SAME CONCERN, BUT HE KNEW BY THE SET OF THE COLONEL'S JAW THAT ARGUMENT WOULD BE USELESS.
BEG PARDON, SIR, BUT WOULDN'T IT BE BEST TO LET A SERGEANT...
STOP FUSSING LIKE AN OLD HEN, JOHNSON! GET ABOARD, MAN, WE'RE READY TO MOVE!

TO THE SWEATING MEN CONCEALED IN THE HAY IT SEEMED AN ENDLESS JOURNEY AS THE WAGONS CREAKED TOWARDS THE VILLAGE.
ACHTUNG— HALTEN!

WITH CURSORY GLANCE, THE GERMAN GUARD COMMANDER WAVED THE WAGONS PAST... BUT IT WAS A FATAL MISTAKE.
MOVE ON, YOU FRENCH PEASANTS, OR IT WILL BE THE WORSE FOR YOU!

TWENTY YARDS, TEN — SLOWLY THE WAGONS CAME ABREAST OF THEIR OBJECTIVE...
LET 'EM HAVE IT, MEN —KEEP THEM AWAY FROM THOSE GUNS.
HIMMEL, ENGLANDER — AGH!


CAUGHT OFF GUARD, THE GERMANS WERE UNABLE TO UNLEASH THE DESTRUCTIVE POWER OF THEIR SPANDAUS.
DON'T LET UP, MEN — CONSOLIDATE BEHIND THE WALL.

IN A DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO REGAIN THE INITIATIVE, A GERMAN OFFICER LED A WILD BUT VAIN CHARGE FROM THE FARMHOUSE.
KEEP THEM BOTTLED UP! REINFORCEMENTS ARE COMING UP.

NUMERICALLY, THE GERMANS WERE SUPERIOR. BUT THE ENEMY COMMANDER HESITATED...
THERE ARE BUT A HANDFUL OF THE SWINE, HERR MAJOR. WE MUST ATTACK BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE!
NEIN, FELDWEBEL — WE...

THE BATTALION SWEPT DOWN FROM THE HILL — AND THE GERMANS HAD LOST ANY CHANCE OF RETRIEVING THEIR POSITION.
YOU'VE GOT T'HAND IT TO HIM, TURK. THE COLONEL'S A BLOOMIN' MARVEL!

IT WAS A PROUD MOMENT FOR THE OLD COLONEL AS A SPONTANEOUS CHEER WENT UP FROM THE MEN.
WHAT THE DEVIL'S THAT FOR?
FOR YOU, SIR. RECKON THE LADS WILL BACK YOU ALL THE WAY FROM NOW ON.

FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE BRIGADE AT CALAIS, IT HAD BEEN A LONG, NERVE-WRACKING DAY OF AERIAL BOMBARDMENT. TOWARDS DUSK, BRIGADIER GREYLAND LOOKED ONCE AGAIN ACROSS THE DESOLATE COUNTRYSIDE.
NO SIGN OF 'EM, RALPH?
THE FUSILIERS, SIR? 'FRAID NOT... I DOUBT IF THEY'LL BE COMING BACK NOW.

WITH A HEAVY HEART THE BRIGADIER MADE HIS WAY BACK THROUGH THE DARKENED STREETS TO CORPS HEADQUARTERS.
I'M AFRAID THE FUSILIERS MUST BE POSTED TO THE LIST OF MISSING, SIR.
WE'D BETTER GET DOWN TO THE DOCKS, GREYLAND. SEE HOW THE EMBARKATION IS GOING.

THE TWO OFFICERS WENT TO LEAVE THE H.Q. BUT THEY GOT NO FARTHER THAN THE STEPS LEADING DOWN TO THE BOULEVARD.
GOOD LORD! IT'S OLD WYNNHAMMOND —HE'S BROUGHT 'EM BACK!

WITH ALL THE FORMALITY OF THE PARADE GROUND, THE COLONEL HALTED HIS TATTERED LEGION AND RODE FORWARD TO REPORT. THEN, SUDDENLY, HE SLIPPED SIDEWAYS FROM THE SADDLE...
DON'T JUST STAND THERE, MAN — FETCH THE M.O.!

IS IT HIS HEART, SIR?
YES, I'D SAY HE'S PUSHED HIS LUCK A BIT HARD. HE'LL NEED TO TAKE THINGS PRETTY EASY...

THE COLONEL WAS STILL UNCONSCIOUS WHEN THEY CARRIED HIM ABOARD A DESTROYER AT THE DOCKS.
GOOD LUCK, WYNNIE—WE WON'T FORGET YOU, MATE...
HE'S OUT O' THE TOP DRAWER, TURK—HE'S A TOFF!

IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED, COLONEL WYNNHAMMOND'S LIFE HUNG BY A THREAD — AND SO DID THE FATE OF THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE.
IF HE CAN HOLD UP FOR ANOTHER TWENTY-FOUR HOURS, HE'LL HAVE PASSED THE CRISIS.
IF THE WEATHER WILL ONLY HOLD FOR ANOTHER DAY, SIR...
THEN OUR ARMY WILL BE DELIVERED TO THESE SHORES IN SAFETY.

THE COLONEL LIVED, AND THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE CAME BACK FROM THE GATES OF HELL. BUT BOTH NEEDED TIME TO HEAL THE WOUNDS OF BATTLE. IT WAS WELL INTO THE AUTUMN WHEN BRIGADIER GREYLAND WENT TO VISIT THE OLD WARRIOR.
HE'S MADE A REMARKABLE RECOVERY, BUT IT'S ONLY THE BELIEF THAT HE CAN STILL BE OF SERVICE THAT'S HOLDING HIM UP.
DON'T WORRY, DOCTOR. I WON'T KICK THE PROP FROM UNDER HIM.

THE BRIGADIER HAD ALWAYS RESPECTED COLONEL WYNNHAMMOND. NOW THAT RESPECT WAS COLOURED WITH AFFECTION.
SO THE BRIGADE'S OFF TO NORTH AFRICA. BY THUNDER, I'D LIKE TO BE COMING WITH YOU.
ALL IN GOOD TIME, COLONEL. ENJOY YOUR SICK LEAVE FOR A WHILE BEFORE YOU REJOIN US...

THE BRIGADIER SAILED FOR THE MIDDLE EAST AND AS THE MONTHS PASSED, THE OLD COLONEL REGAINED SOMETHING OF HIS LOST HEALTH AND VIGOUR.

MAYBE THIS IS THE LETTER YOU'VE BEEN EXPECTIN', SIR.

LETTER? GIVE IT TO ME, MAN!

IMPATIENTLY, THE COLONEL RIPPED OPEN THE BUFF-COLOURED ENVELOPE.

AFF.H.Q.

DEAR SIR.

I AM WRITING TO CONFIRM YOUR APPOINTMENT AS OFFICER COMMANDING NO. RECRUITING CENTRE, CHICHESTER. I HAVE BEEN INSTRUCTED BY THE G.O.C. TO CONVEY HIS PERSONAL REGARDS, AND HOPES THAT YOUR HEALTH MAY CONTINUE TO IMPR. I HAVE THE HONOUR TO REMAIN, SIR.

YOUR OBEDIENT SERVANT,

A.R. Wilcox.

A.R. WILCOX
MAJOR. W.D. 1/307.

CONFIDENTIAL

BY GEORGE! I'LL NOT TAKE THIS LYING DOWN...!

THE COLONEL WAS NOT THE MAN TO LET GRASS GROW UNDER HIS FEET.

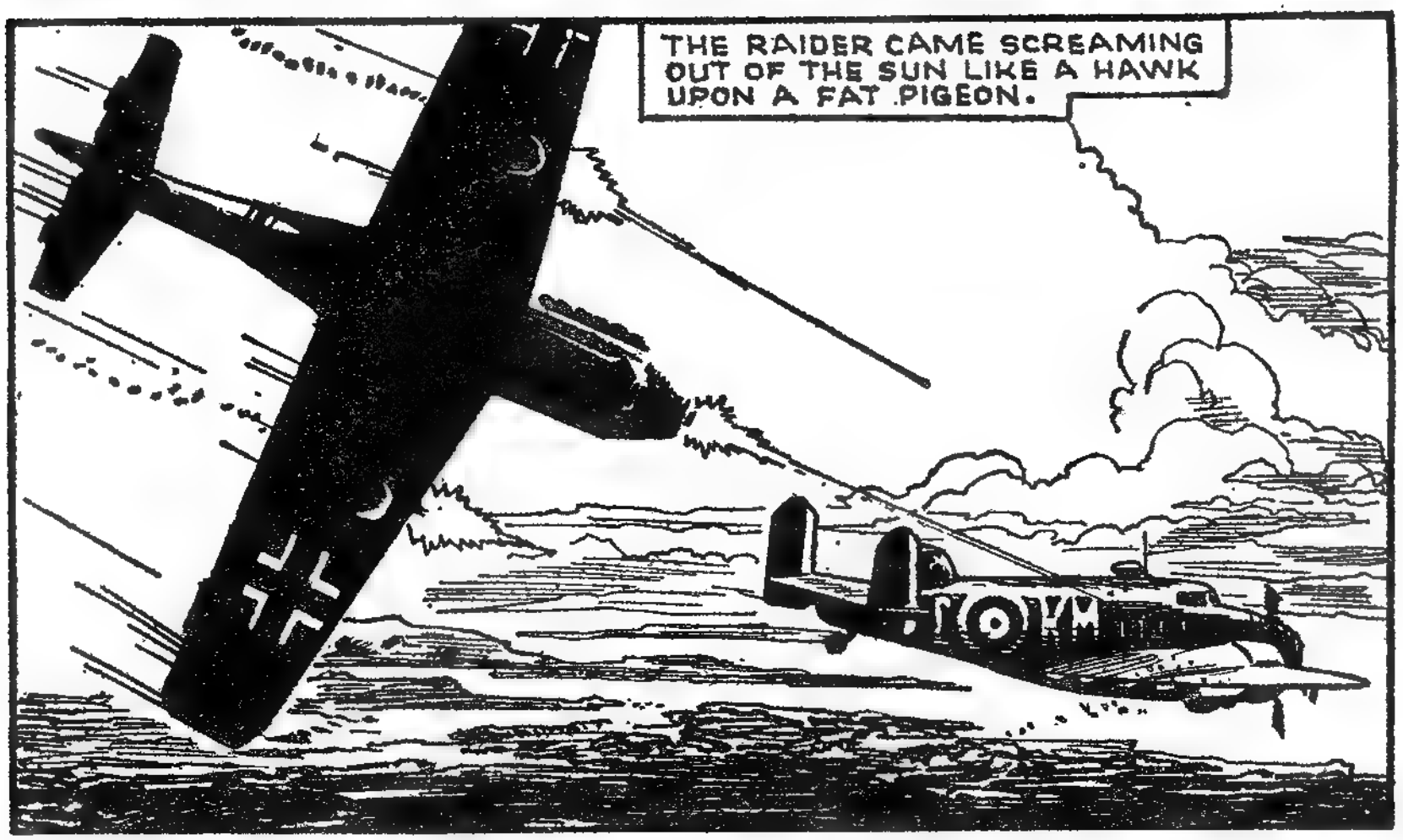
GET OUR TROPICAL KIT PACKED, JOHNSON. WE'RE GOING TO REJOIN THE BRIGADE.

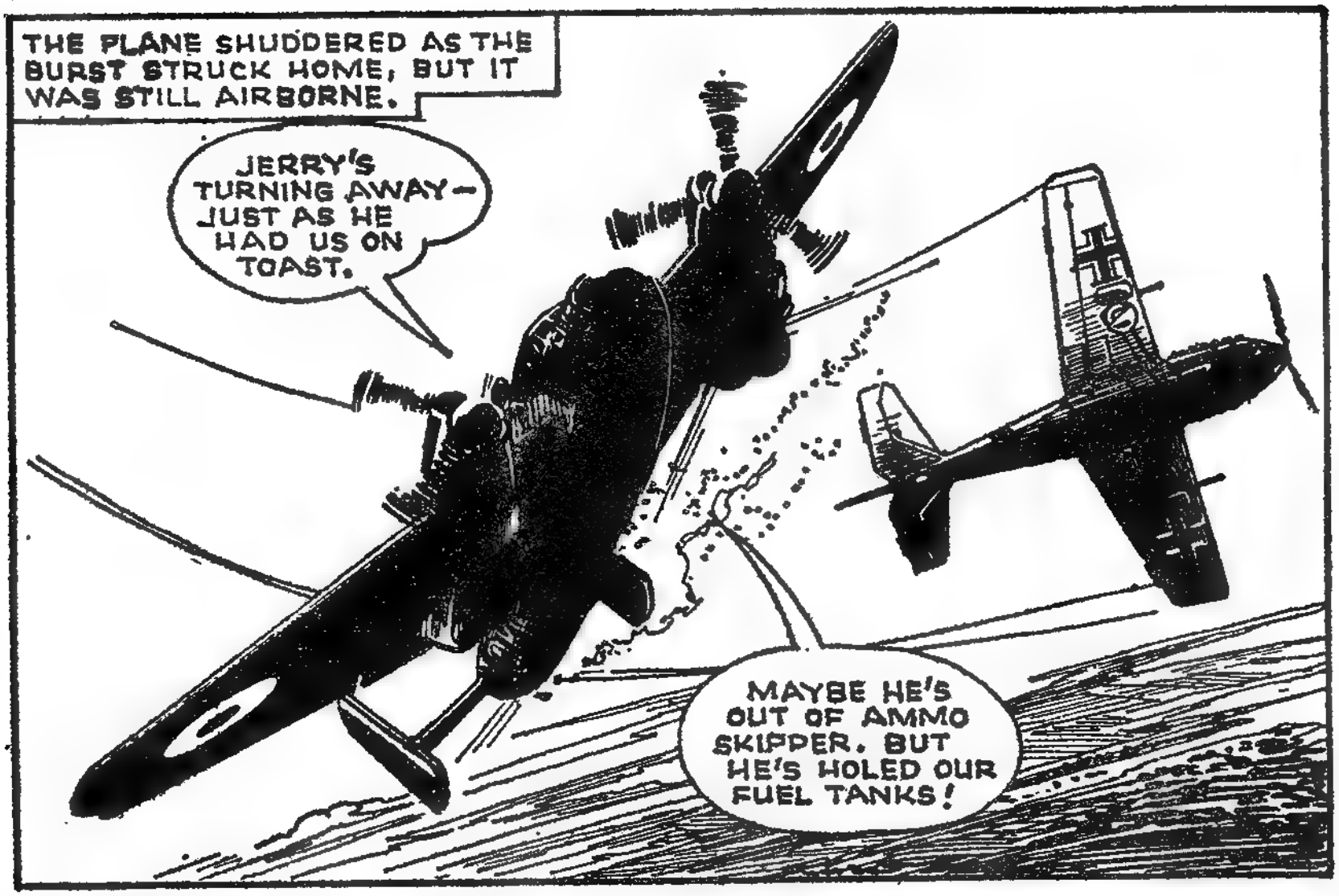
AFRICA, SIR! BLESS MY COTTON SOCKS!

IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON BY THE TIME THE OLD SOLDIER REACHED THE OUTWARD-BOUND TROOPING DEPOT NEAR SOUTHAMPTON.
DON'T JUST STAND THERE BLABBERING ABOUT MOVEMENT ORDERS. I MUST BE ON THE NEXT PLANE TO CAIRO. JUMP TO IT, MAN!
ER... YES, SIR ... AT ONCE, SIR.

OVERAWED BY THE FIERY COLONEL, THE FLUSTERED YOUNG OFFICER MANAGED TO ARRANGE TRANSPORT ON A HUDSON THAT WAS SCHEDULED FOR A ROUTINE FLIGHT TO AFRICA.
'ERE WE GO AGAIN, SIR. ANOTHER CAMPAIGN.
THIS TIME, PERHAPS OUR LAST, JOHNSON...

# Chapter 3. DESERT GLORY




THE PLANE SHUDDERED AS THE BURST STRUCK HOME, BUT IT WAS STILL AIRBORNE.
JERRY'S TURNING AWAY— JUST AS HE HAD US ON TOAST.
MAYBE HE'S OUT OF AMMO SKIPPER. BUT HE'S HOLED OUR FUEL TANKS!

NOT A HOPE OF MAKING CAIRO NOW. I'LL HAVE TO SETTLE HER DOWN: THAT'S EL DUM DUM AHEAD.

THE FUSILIERS WERE AT EL DUM DUM. THE SAME MEN WHO HAD SERVED A BITTER APPRENTICESHIP WITH THE B.E.F. IN FRANCE. NOW THEY WERE VETERANS.
LOOKS LIKE WE'VE GOT COMPANY, SIR.
I WONDER WHO THE HECK IT IS?

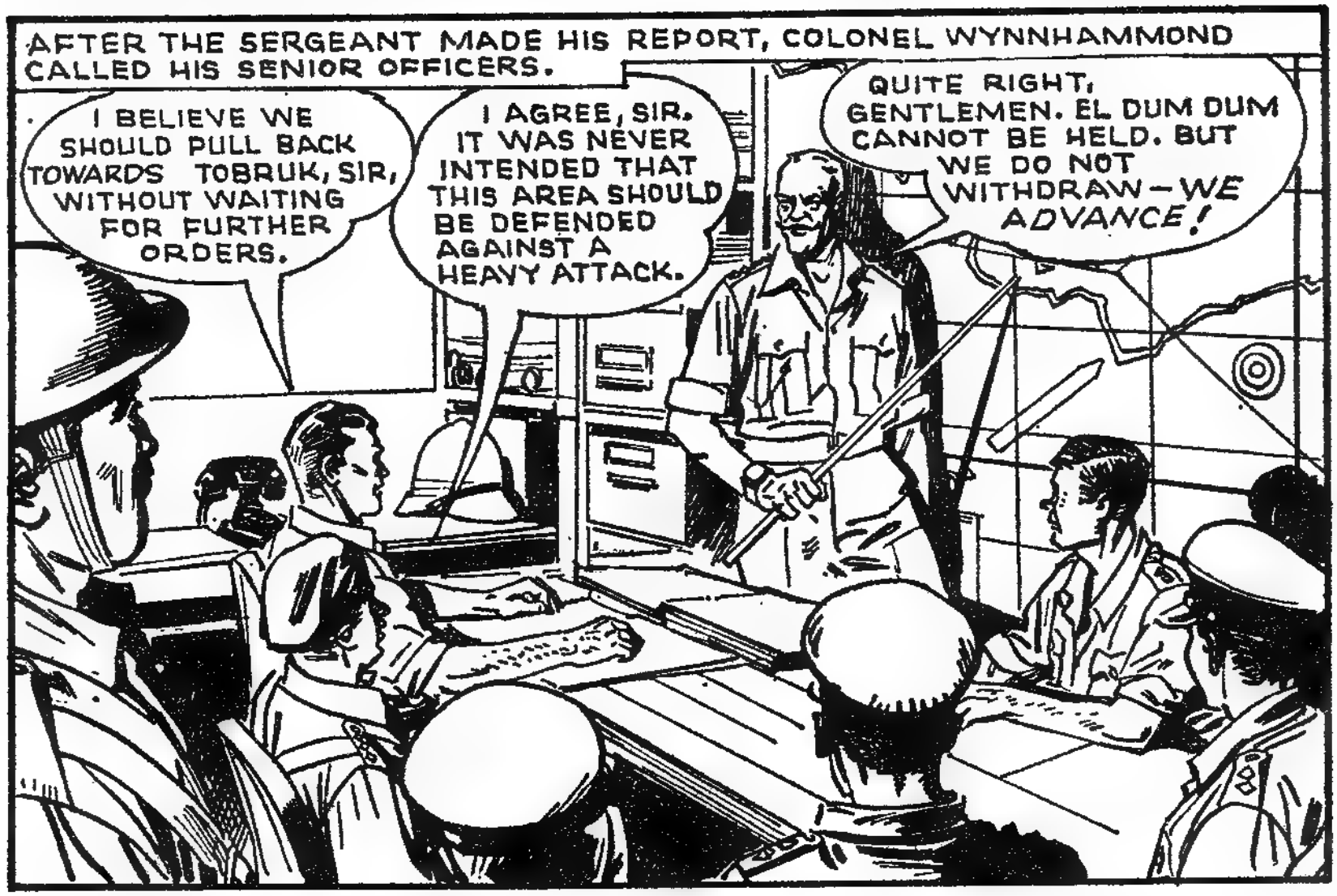
THERE WAS SOMETHING VAGUELY FAMILIAR ABOUT THE ALMOST BIZARRE FIGURES THAT EMERGED FROM THE PLANE. THEN...
GOOD MORNING, SIR. I'M SORRY THE COMMANDING OFFICER IS NOT HERE TO MEET YOU.
DON'T APOLOGISE, MAJOR. THIS VISIT WAS NOT PLANNED... GOOD HEAVENS, THE SAR'-MAJOR...
GREAT GUNS! IT'S THE COLONEL!

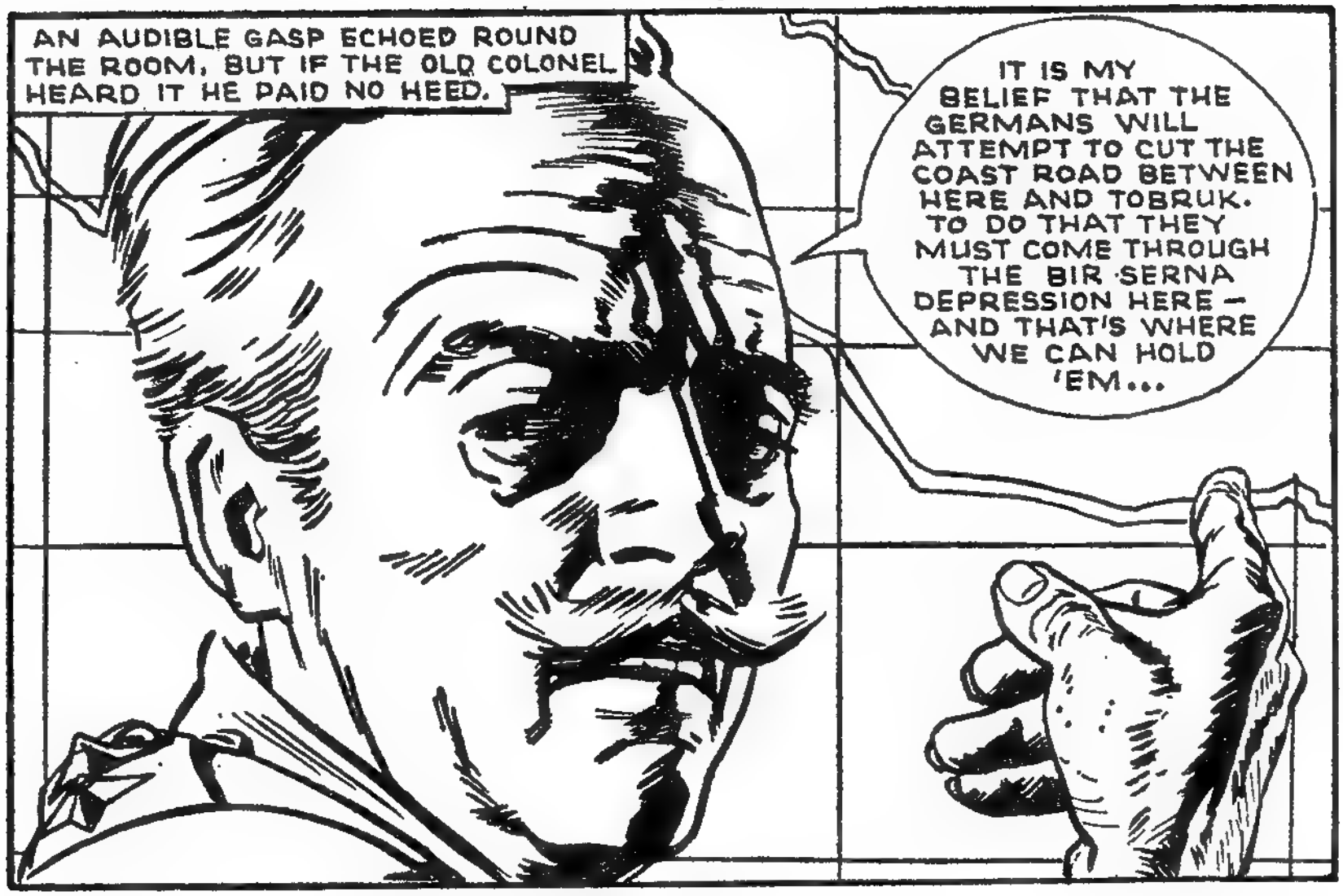
THE NEWS OF THE COLONEL'S ARRIVAL SPREAD LIKE A BUSHFIRE...
GOOD OLD WYNNIE!
THE MEN SEEM TO KNOW YOU WELL, SIR?
WE'VE MET, MAJOR— WE'VE MET BEFORE!

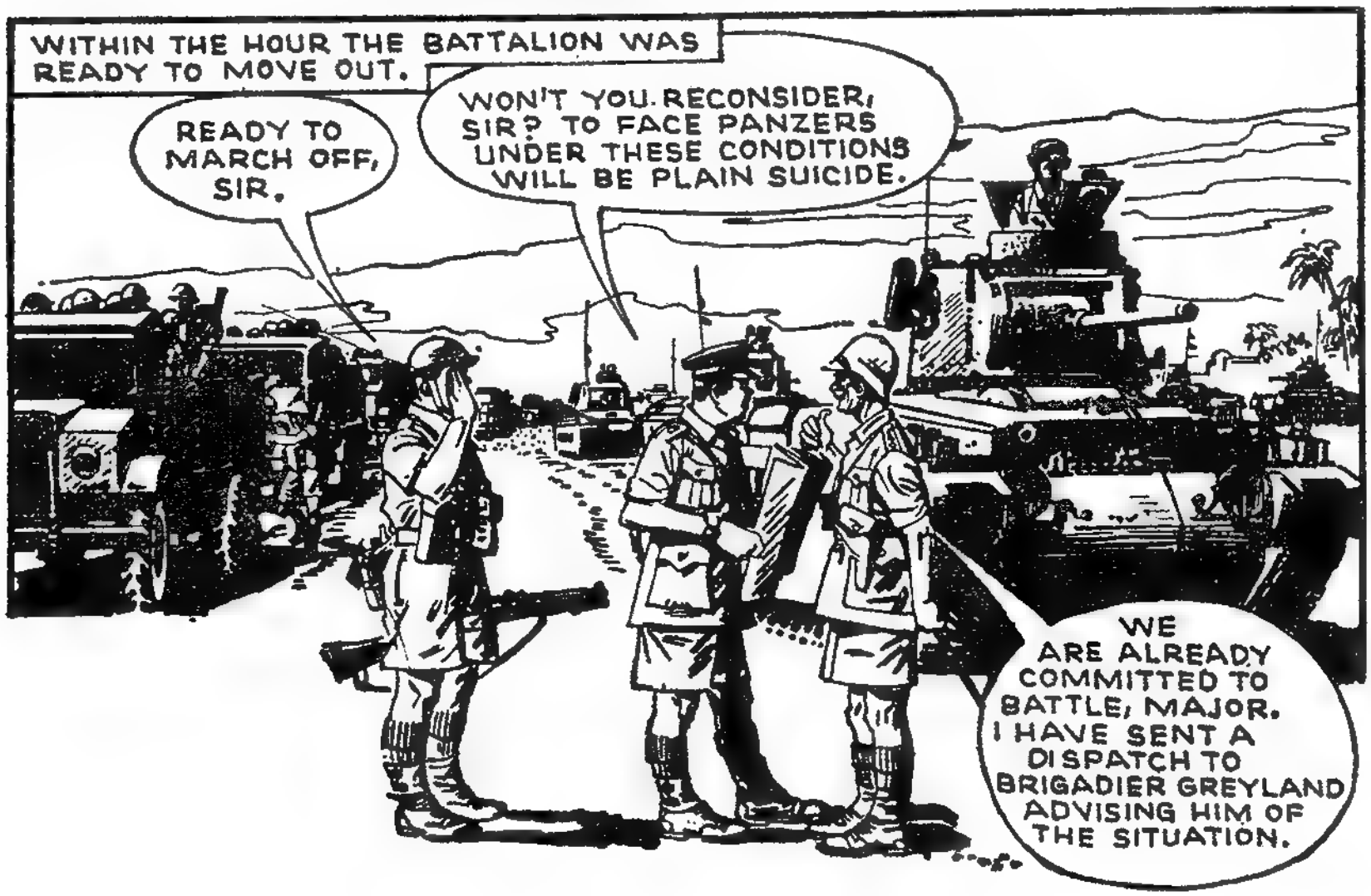
COLONEL WYNNHAMMOND HAD NOTICED THE LINES OF ANXIETY ETCHED AROUND THE YOUNG MAJOR'S EYES.
YESTERDAY WE HEARD THAT JERRY PANZERS WERE ON THE WARPATH. WE HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO RAISE BRIGADE SO OUR C.O. WENT BACK TO TOBRUK FOR A SIT. REP., BUT NOW HE'S LONG OVERDUE. FRANKLY, I DON'T LIKE IT, SIR...
I SEE, MAJOR. AS SENIOR OFFICER I'D BETTER TAKE COMMAND UNTIL YOUR C.O. GETS BACK.

A MATILDA TANK OF A HUSSAR DETACHMENT WAS SENT TOWARDS TOBRUK TO LOOK FOR THE MISSING COLONEL.
SEE THE BUZZARDS UP AHEAD, SARGE!
LOOKS BAD, BILL - DRIVER, ADVANCE!

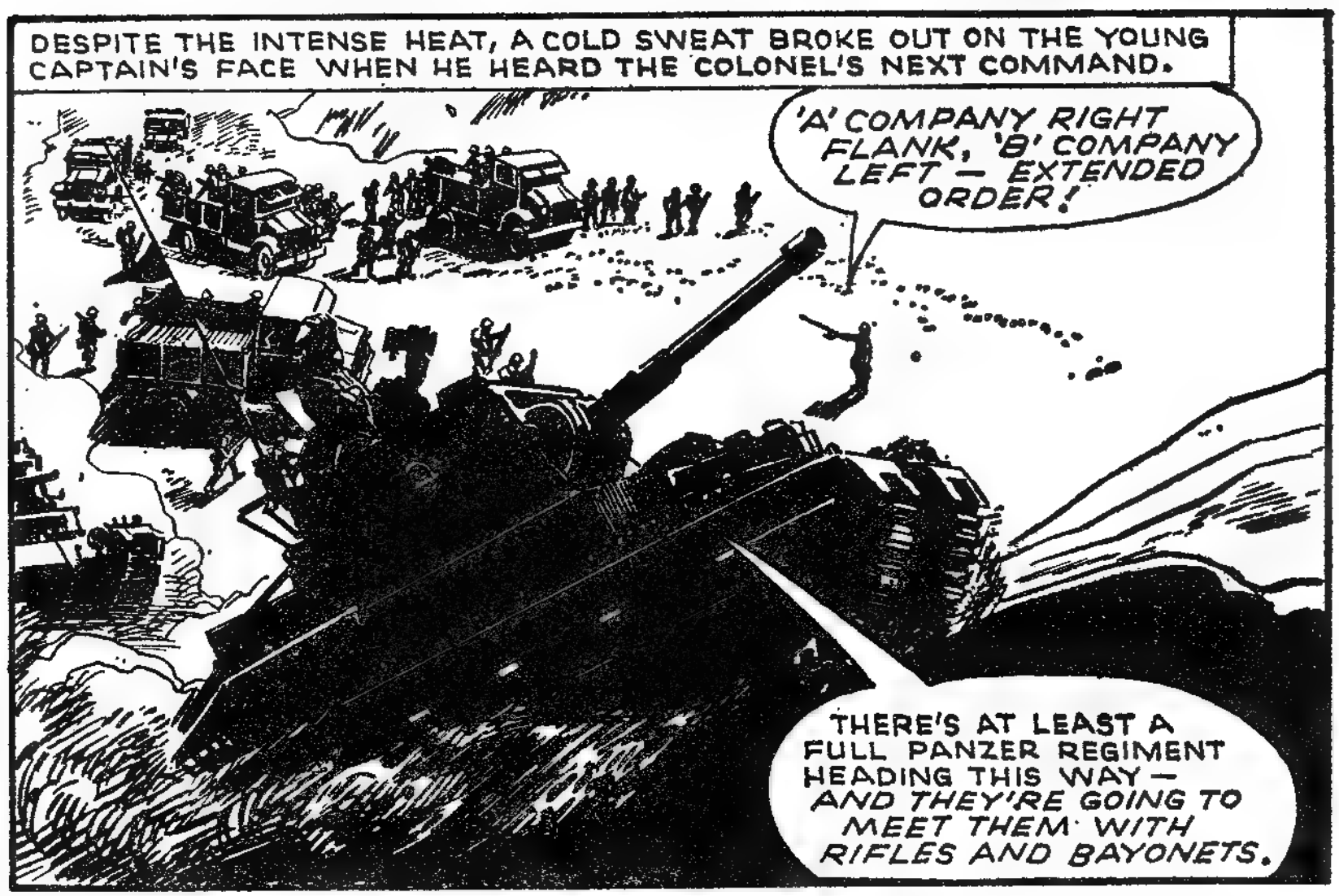
A MILE UP THE ROAD AND THEY HAD FOUND OUT WHY THE C.O. HAD NEVER COME BACK.
JERRY ARMOURED CAR TRACKS! COULD BE A DEEP PENETRATION PATROL, SARGE.
IF JERRY'S GOT THIS FAR, IT LOOKS UGLY FOR TOBRUK. LET'S GET BACK PRONTO.


AFTER THE SERGEANT MADE HIS REPORT, COLONEL WYNNHAMMOND CALLED HIS SENIOR OFFICERS.
I BELIEVE WE SHOULD PULL BACK TOWARDS TOBRUK, SIR, WITHOUT WAITING FOR FURTHER ORDERS.
I AGREE, SIR. IT WAS NEVER INTENDED THAT THIS AREA SHOULD BE DEFENDED AGAINST A HEAVY ATTACK.
QUITE RIGHT, GENTLEMEN. EL DUM DUM CANNOT BE HELD. BUT WE DO NOT WITHDRAW—WE ADVANCE!


AN AUDIBLE GASP ECHOED ROUND THE ROOM, BUT IF THE OLD COLONEL HEARD IT HE PAID NO HEED.
IT IS MY BELIEF THAT THE GERMANS WILL ATTEMPT TO CUT THE COAST ROAD BETWEEN HERE AND TOBRUK. TO DO THAT THEY MUST COME THROUGH THE BIR SERNA DEPRESSION HERE — AND THAT'S WHERE WE CAN HOLD 'EM...


WITHIN THE HOUR THE BATTALION WAS READY TO MOVE OUT.
READY TO MARCH OFF, SIR.
WON'T YOU RECONSIDER, SIR? TO FACE PANZERS UNDER THESE CONDITIONS WILL BE PLAIN SUICIDE.
WE ARE ALREADY COMMITTED TO BATTLE, MAJOR. I HAVE SENT A DISPATCH TO BRIGADIER GREYLAND ADVISING HIM OF THE SITUATION.

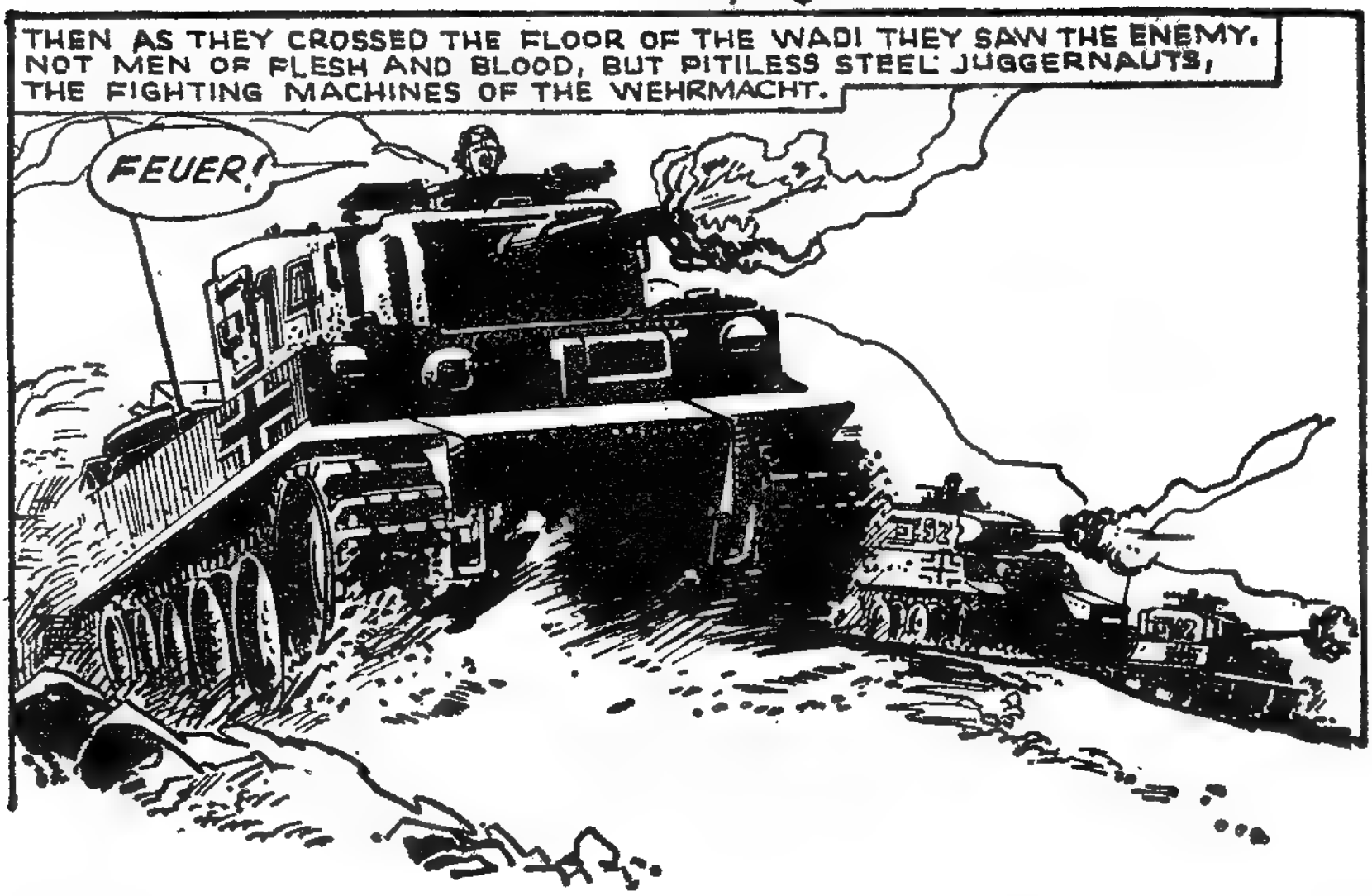
TRAVELLING STEADILY SOUTH-WEST, THE COLUMN AT LAST CAME IN SIGHT OF THE GAUNT ESCARPMENT THAT TOWERED ABOVE THE BIR SERNA DEPRESSION.
WHY HAVE YOU STOPPED, CAPTAIN?
THERE'S BIR SERNA, SIR, BUT JERRY'S BEATEN US TO IT. THAT'S NO DUST STORM—THAT'S ARMOUR, A LOT OF IT!


DESPITE THE INTENSE HEAT, A COLD SWEAT BROKE OUT ON THE YOUNG CAPTAIN'S FACE WHEN HE HEARD THE COLONEL'S NEXT COMMAND.
'A' COMPANY RIGHT FLANK, 'B' COMPANY LEFT — EXTENDED ORDER!
THERE'S AT LEAST A FULL PANZER REGIMENT HEADING THIS WAY — AND THEY'RE GOING TO MEET THEM WITH RIFLES AND BAYONETS.

A RAGGED CHEER WENT UP FROM THE RANKS AS THE COLONEL MOVED OUT TO TAKE HIS PLACE AT THE FRONT OF THE BATTALION.

YOU CAN'T DO IT, SIR. WE'LL BE CUT TO RIBBONS!

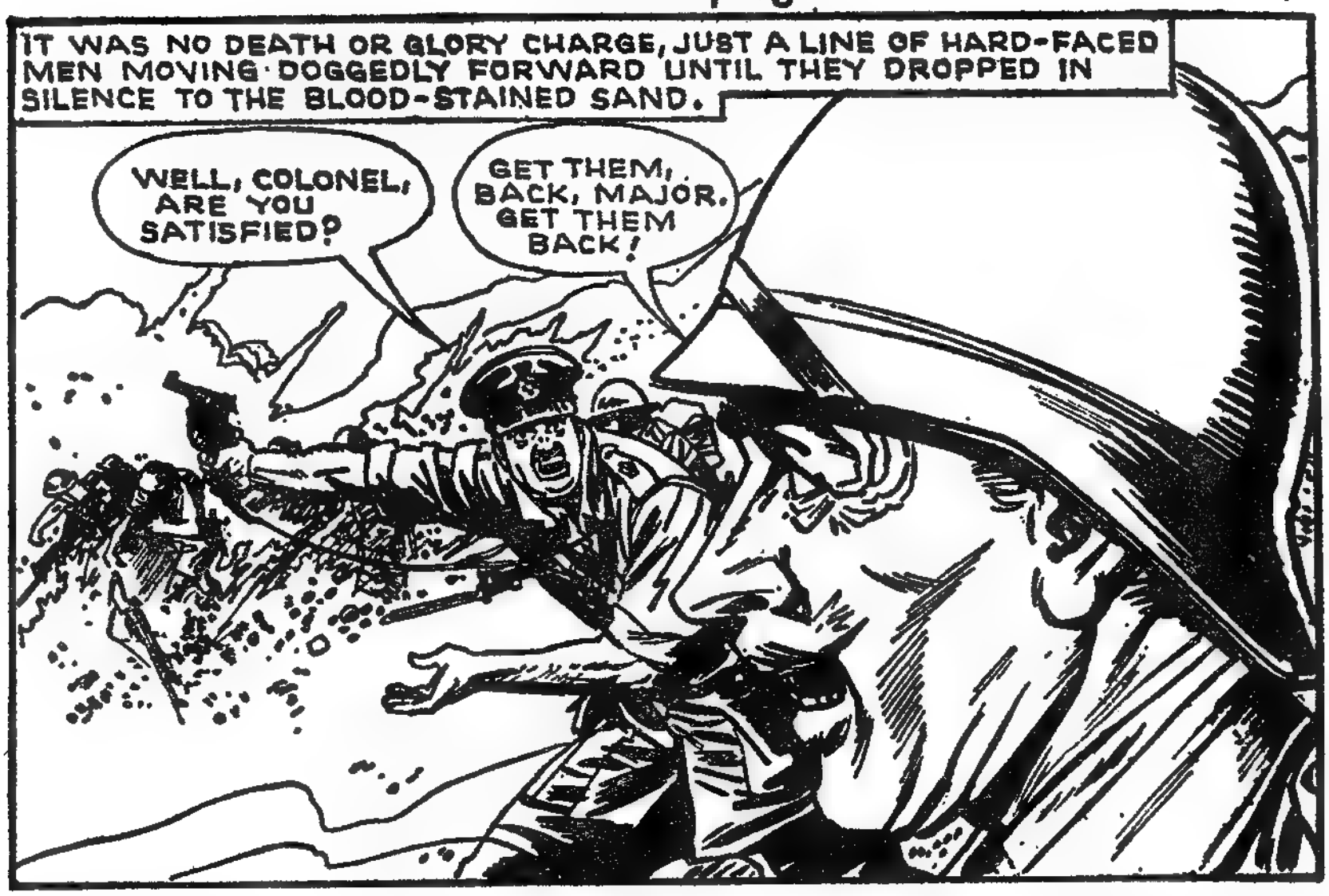
MAJOR, I WAS FACING LONG ODDS WITH SHORT BAYONETS BEFORE YOU WERE BORN. LISTEN TO THOSE MEN— THEY TRUST ME. WE'RE GOING TO ADVANCE!


THEN AS THEY CROSSED THE FLOOR OF THE WADI THEY SAW THE ENEMY. NOT MEN OF FLESH AND BLOOD, BUT PITILESS STEEL JUGGERNAUTS, THE FIGHTING MACHINES OF THE WEHRMACHT.
FEUER!

FOR A MOMENT, THE LEADING RANKS OF THE BATTALION WAVERED. THEN DRY-LIPPED MEN GRIPPED THEIR RIFLES MORE FIRMLY AND TRUDGED ON.
THIS IS WHERE WE COP IT, SAM!
HAD TO COME SOME TIME, SMOKEY! SAFETY CATCHES OFF, LADS...

THEY WERE STILL GOING FORWARD WHEN THE FIRST SALVOES OF HIGH EXPLOSIVES FROM THE GERMAN GUNS CARVED TERRIBLE GASHES IN THEIR RANKS.

HIS FACE A MASK OF HORROR, THE COLONEL LOOKED AROUND HIM. THIS WAS SLAUGHTER, NOT BATTLE. THERE WAS NO ENEMY TO GRAPPLE WITH, ONLY THE INHUMAN MACHINES THAT CRAWLED TOWARDS THEM, DEATH SPITTING FROM THEIR GUNS.
WHAT HAVE I DONE...?


IT WAS NO DEATH OR GLORY CHARGE, JUST A LINE OF HARD-FACED MEN MOVING DOGGEDLY FORWARD UNTIL THEY DROPPED IN SILENCE TO THE BLOOD-STAINED SAND.
WELL, COLONEL, ARE YOU SATISFIED?
GET THEM BACK, MAJOR. GET THEM BACK!

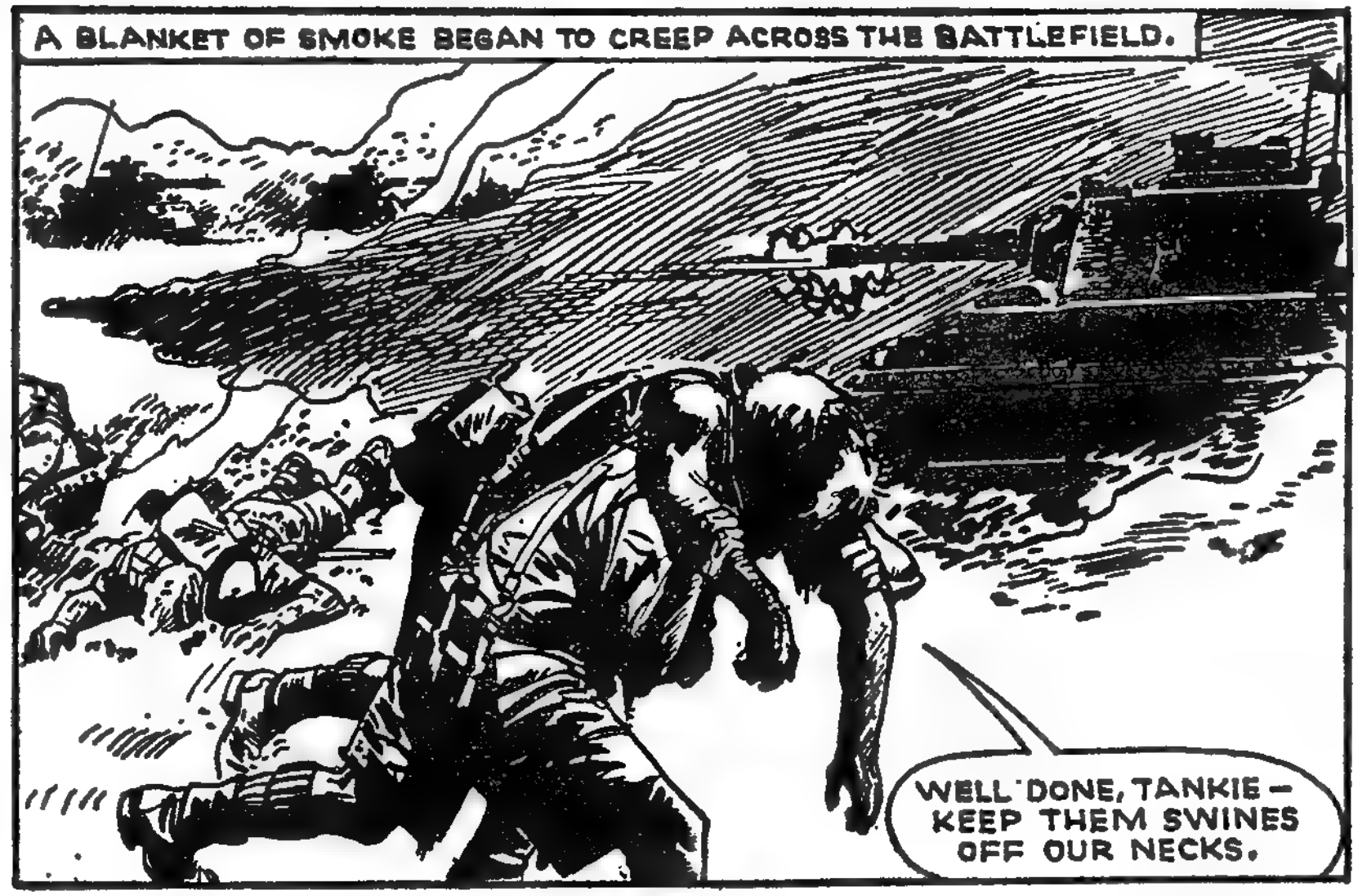
ABOVE THE EAR-SPLITTING DETONATIONS, THE MAJOR'S VOICE RANG OUT.
BACK, MEN — BACK UP THE SLOPE! IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE!

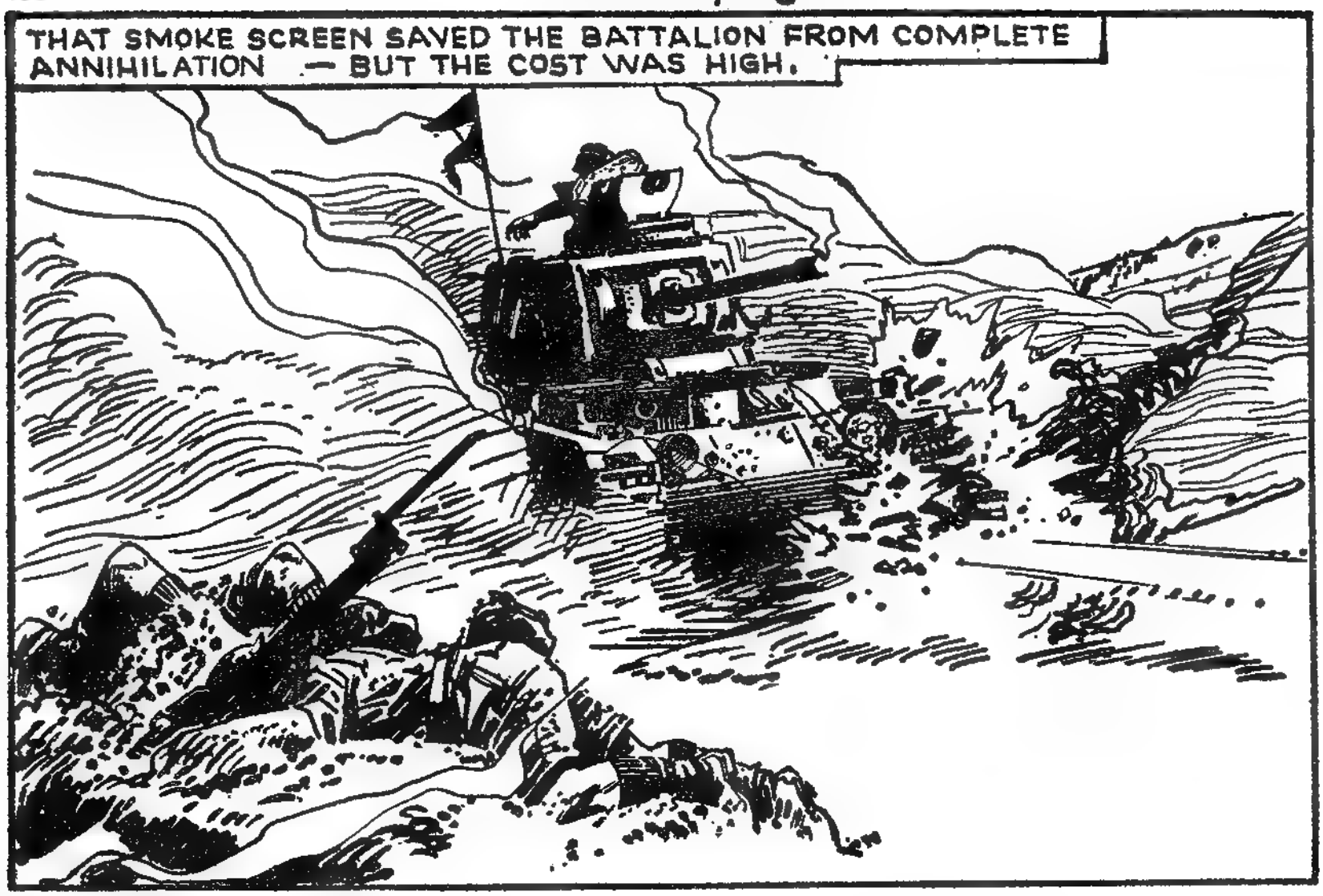
A MINUTE LATER, MAJOR KIRBY WAS DEAD.

ONE MOMENT THE BATTALION WAS AN ORGANIZED FIGHTING UNIT. THE NEXT, A RABBLE OF WILD-EYED MEN CLAWING UP THE SLOPE TO ESCAPE THE CARNAGE OF THE GERMAN GUNS.
AAAGH!

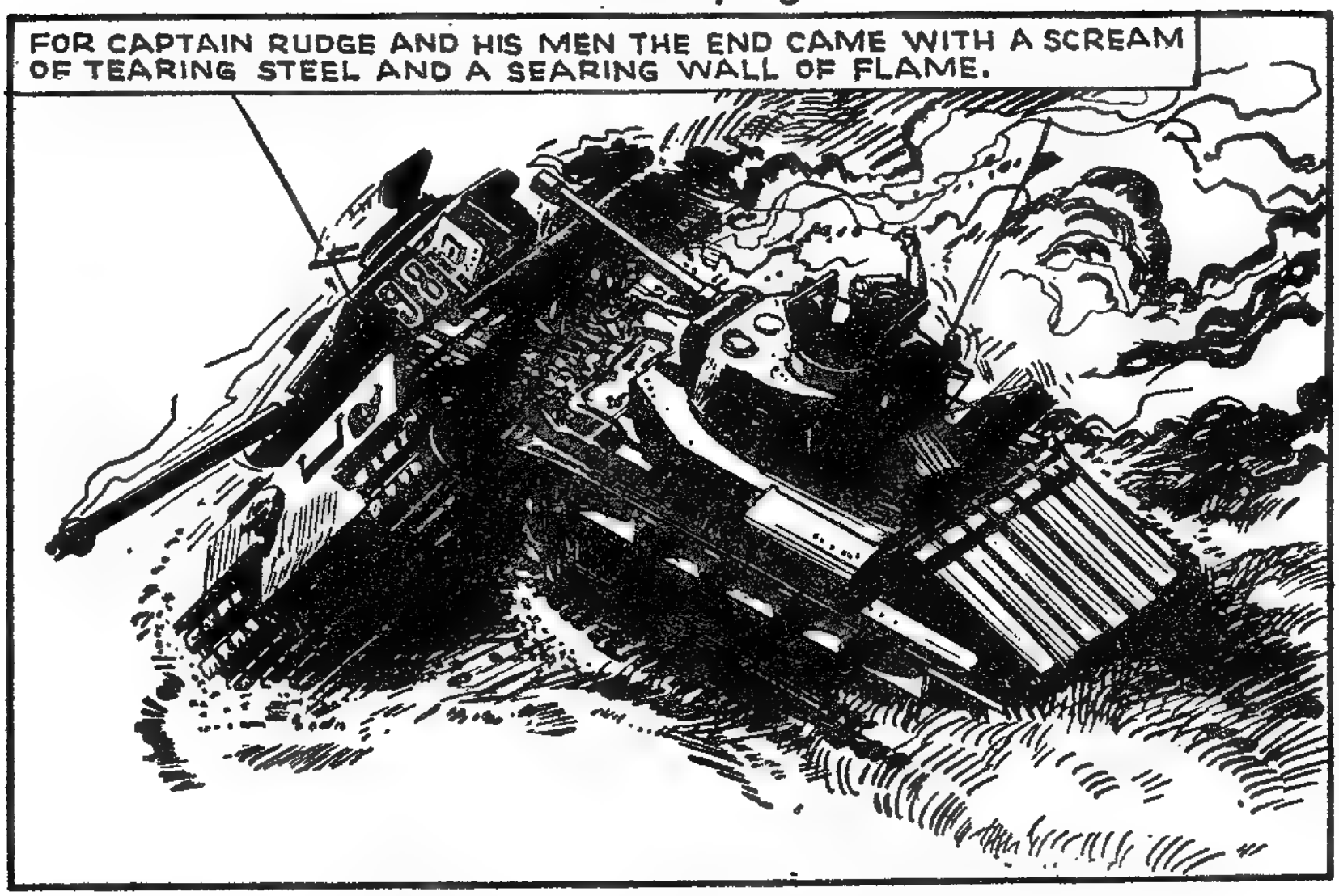
WITH SICK HORROR CAPTAIN RUDGE WATCHED THE BATTALION BREAK AND RUN.
WE CAN'T JUST STAND BY. GIVE THEM A SMOKE SCREEN COVER, SERGEANT.
WILCO, SIR.

A MALICIOUS SMILE LIT THE FACE OF THE COMMANDER OF THE PANZER REGIMENT.
AH! SO THE FOOLS COME LIKE LAMBS TO THE SLAUGHTER. CHANGE TO ARMOUR-PIERCING SHELLS!
JAWOHL, HERR OBERST.


A BLANKET OF SMOKE BEGAN TO CREEP ACROSS THE BATTLEFIELD.
WELL DONE, TANKIE — KEEP THEM SWINES OFF OUR NECKS.


THAT SMOKE SCREEN SAVED THE BATTALION FROM COMPLETE ANNIHILATION — BUT THE COST WAS HIGH.

CHEATED OF THEIR PREY, THE GERMAN PANZERS CLOSED IN ON THE BRITISH TANKS LIKE A PACK OF TIMBER WOLVES.
HERE THEY COME, MEN. INDEPENDENT GUN CONTROL — LET'S TAKE ONE OF THE BRUTES WITH US!


FOR CAPTAIN RUDGE AND HIS MEN THE END CAME WITH A SCREAM OF TEARING STEEL AND A SEARING WALL OF FLAME.

WHILE THE HUSSARS FOUGHT THEIR LAST BITTER BATTLE, A DISPATCH REACHED TOBRUK.
THE SITUATION IS GRAVE, GENTLEMEN. THE GERMAN SPEARHEAD IS AIMED TO CUT THE COAST ROAD BETWEEN HERE AND BENGHAZI. WE...
MESSAGE, SIR! COLONEL WYNNHAMMOND HAS TAKEN COMMAND OF THE FUSILIERS AT DUM-DUM AND HE IS ENGAGING THE ENEMY.

CLIVE! CLIVE IN AFRICA?
YES, SIR. I DON'T KNOW HOW OR WHY, BUT...
ALL RIGHT, GREYLAND, SAVE IT FOR THE INQUEST. RIGHT NOW WE'D BETTER, FIND OUT WHAT THE DEVIL IS GOING ON THERE...

ON THE BATTLEGROUND ITSELF...
WHERE... WHERE'S THE BATTALION, SERGEANT-MAJOR?
I'VE GOT HALF 'C' COMPANY IN TOW HERE, SIR. THE REST OF THE LADS ARE SCATTERED TO THE FOUR WINDS. BEST IF WE MAKE TRACKS FOR THE ESCARPMENT...

I'VE BEEN AN OLD FOOL, SERGEANT-MAJOR, WHO DIDN'T KNOW WHEN HE WAS OUT OF THE RUNNING — AND IT'S YOUR MEN WHO'VE HAD TO PAY THE PRICE!
WE ALL MAKE MISTAKES, SIR.
EASY NOW, SIR...
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS LIFE, THE COLONEL KNEW THE CRUSHING WEIGHT OF DESPAIR.
I FAILED THEM, JOHNSON! NOTHING TO BE DONE NOW, BUT COUNT THE COST.
WE'RE NOT LICKED YET, SIR! LOOK DOWN THERE...

FAR BELOW THEM, A GERMAN SUPPLY COLUMN WAS IN LEAGUER.
THE PANZERS HAVE BROKEN THROUGH BUT THEY WON'T GET FAR WITHOUT FUEL. IF WE COULD CLOBBER THOSE FUEL TANKERS...
BUT WE CAN'T EXPECT THESE MEN TO PUT IN A SUICIDAL CHARGE NOW. IT'S ASKING TOO MUCH...

THEY'LL DO IT FOR YOU, SIR. YOU LEAD AND THEY'LL FOLLOW.

FOR LONG MOMENTS THE COLONEL STOOD IN SILENCE. THEN HE TURNED TO THE MEN — AND HIS SHOULDERS WERE SQUARE AGAIN.
THERE COMES A TIME FOR EVERY SOLDIER WHEN HE MUST FACE HIS DUTY REGARDLESS OF COST. WE CAN SAVE THE REMNANTS OF OUR ARMY FIGHTING ITS WAY BACK TO TOBRUK. WILL YOU COME WITH ME, MEN?

THE COLONEL TURNED AWAY TO THE LONG STEEP SLOPE — AND SLOWLY, MEN ROSE TO THEIR FEET.

A GERMAN SENTRY SAW THE LINE OF SHADOWS DETACH THEMSELVES FROM THE DARKNESS.
WAS IS DAS? TEUFEL - ENGLANDERS!
ACHTUNG BENZINE

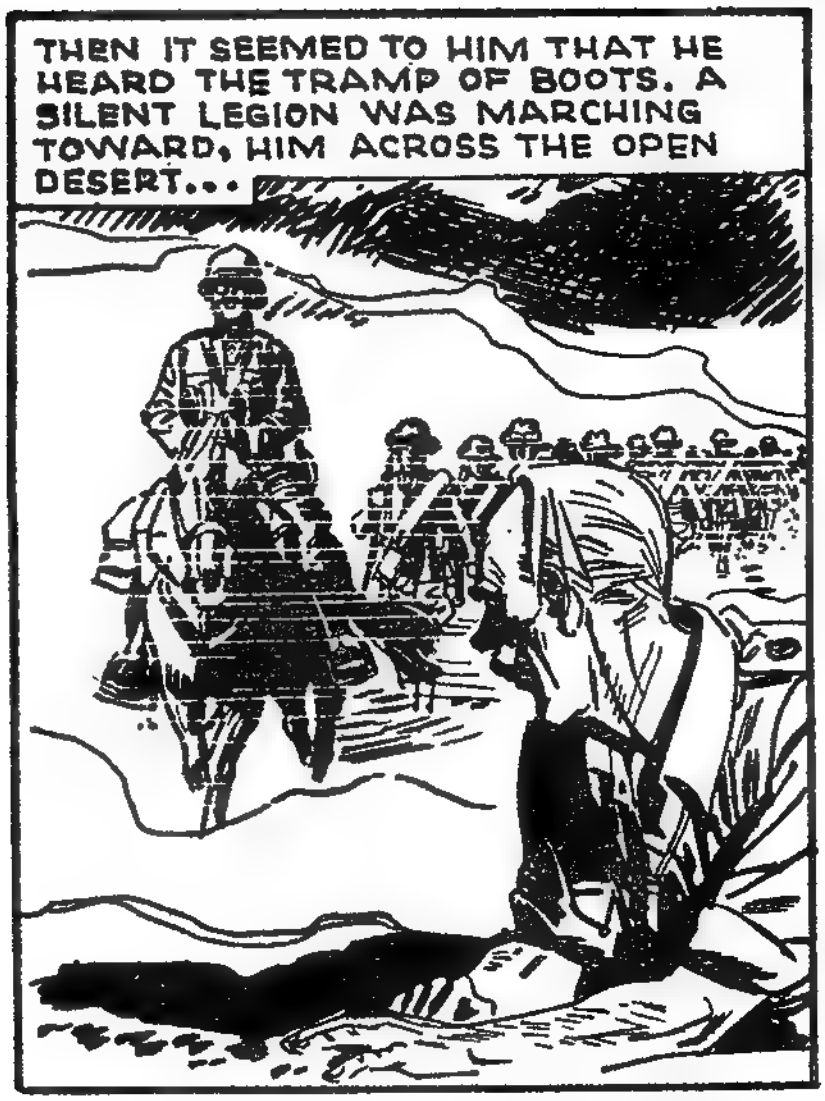
THEY WERE A HUNDRED YARDS FROM THE TIGHT-PACKED GERMAN VEHICLES WHEN THE COLONEL GAVE HIS LAST COMMAND.
GRENADES READY, MEN— CHARGE!

FROM SOMEWHERE ON THE LEFT FLANK A SPANDAU STUTTERED ANGRILY BUT BY THEN, NOTHING COULD CHECK THE BLEAK-EYED SOLDIERS.
ON, MEN, ON!
JOHNSON!

KNEELING BESIDE HIS BATMAN, THE COLONEL WAS OBLIVIOUS OF THE WILD CONFUSION AND DESTRUCTION ABOUT HIM.
JOHNSON, LAD...
SORRY—SORRY, COLONEL, LOOKS LIKE YOU'LL HAVE TO GO IT ALONE NOW, I'VE DONE ME LAST PARADE.

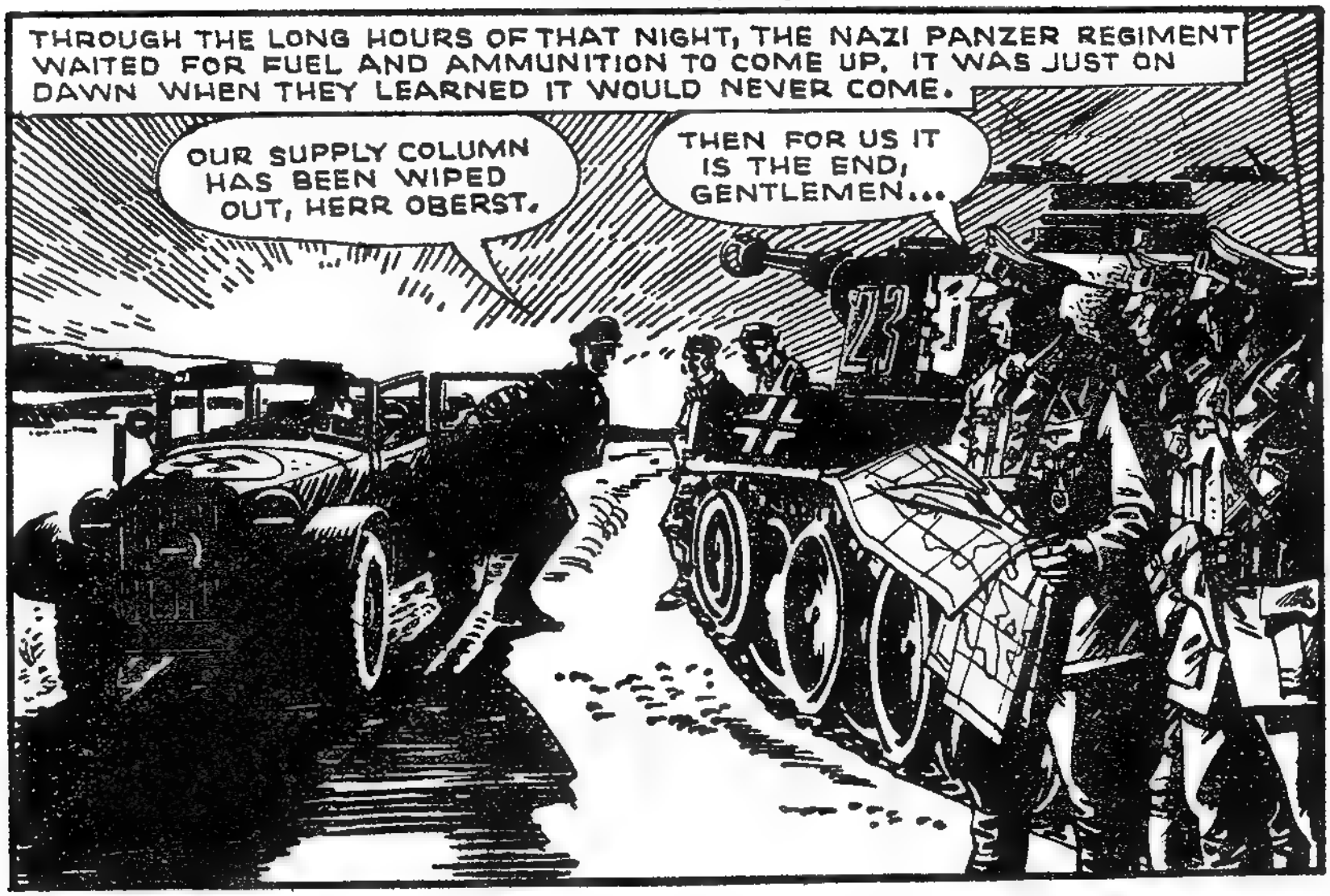
BUT FOR THE COLONEL, THE END HAD ARRIVED, TOO. AS HE STRAIGHTENED UP, AN IRON HAND CLUTCHED AT HIS HEART AND A FIERY PAIN STABBED THROUGH HIS CHEST.
THEY DID IT, THEY... UGH!

THERE WAS A SMILE ON HIS LINED FACE AS HE LOOKED TOWARDS THE INFERNO. THE SMILE OF A WEARY MAN WHO AT LAST SEES THE END OF A LONG AND TROUBLED JOURNEY.

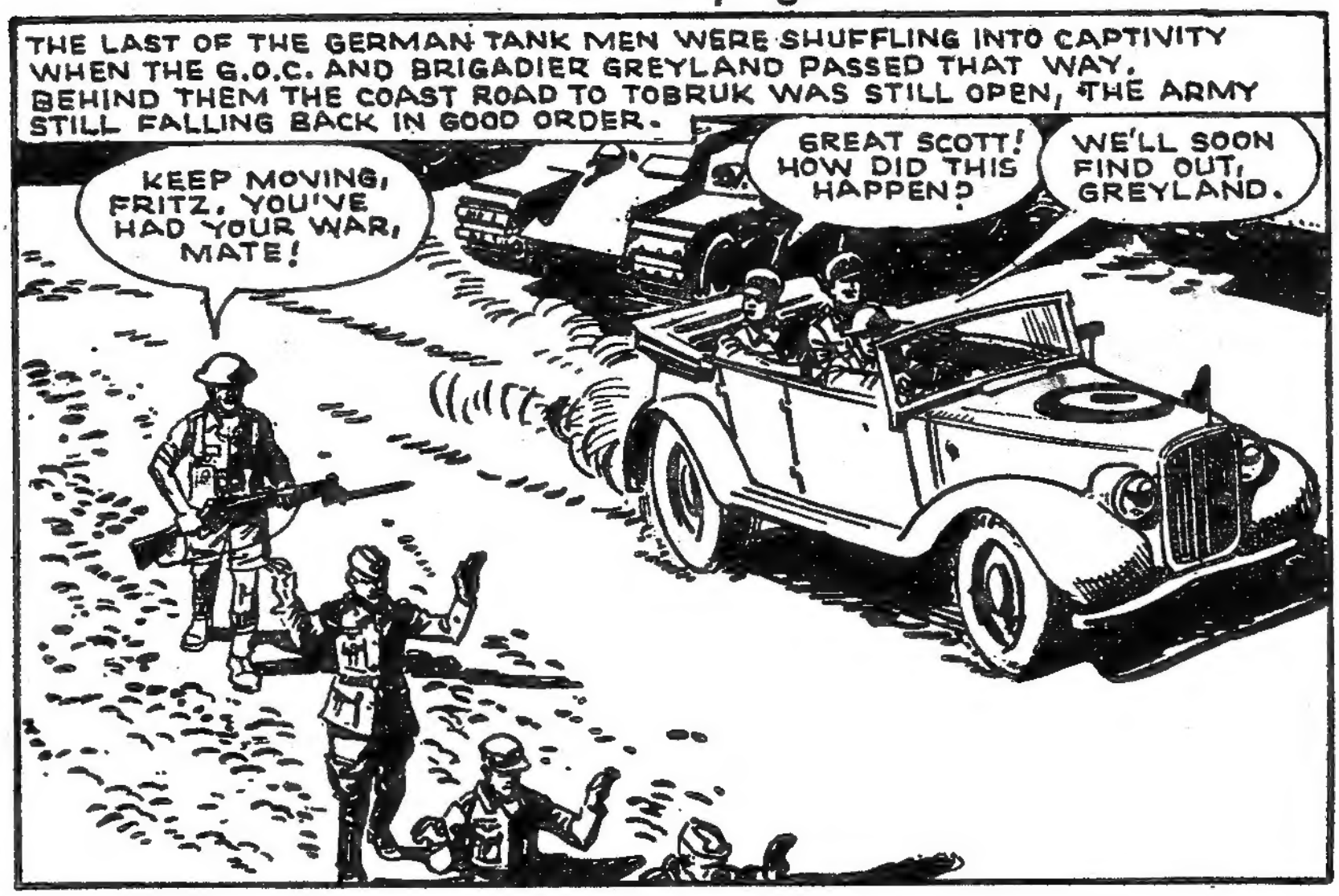

THEN IT SEEMED TO HIM THAT HE HEARD THE TRAMP OF BOOTS. A SILENT LEGION WAS MARCHING TOWARD, HIM ACROSS THE OPEN DESERT...

HE TRIED TO RAISE ONE HAND TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE SALUTES OF MEN HE HAD KNOWN LONG AGO. CAPTAIN SINCLAIR, OF SKINNER'S LIGHT HORSE AND THE MEN OF HIS OLD COMPANY FROM PRETORIA...

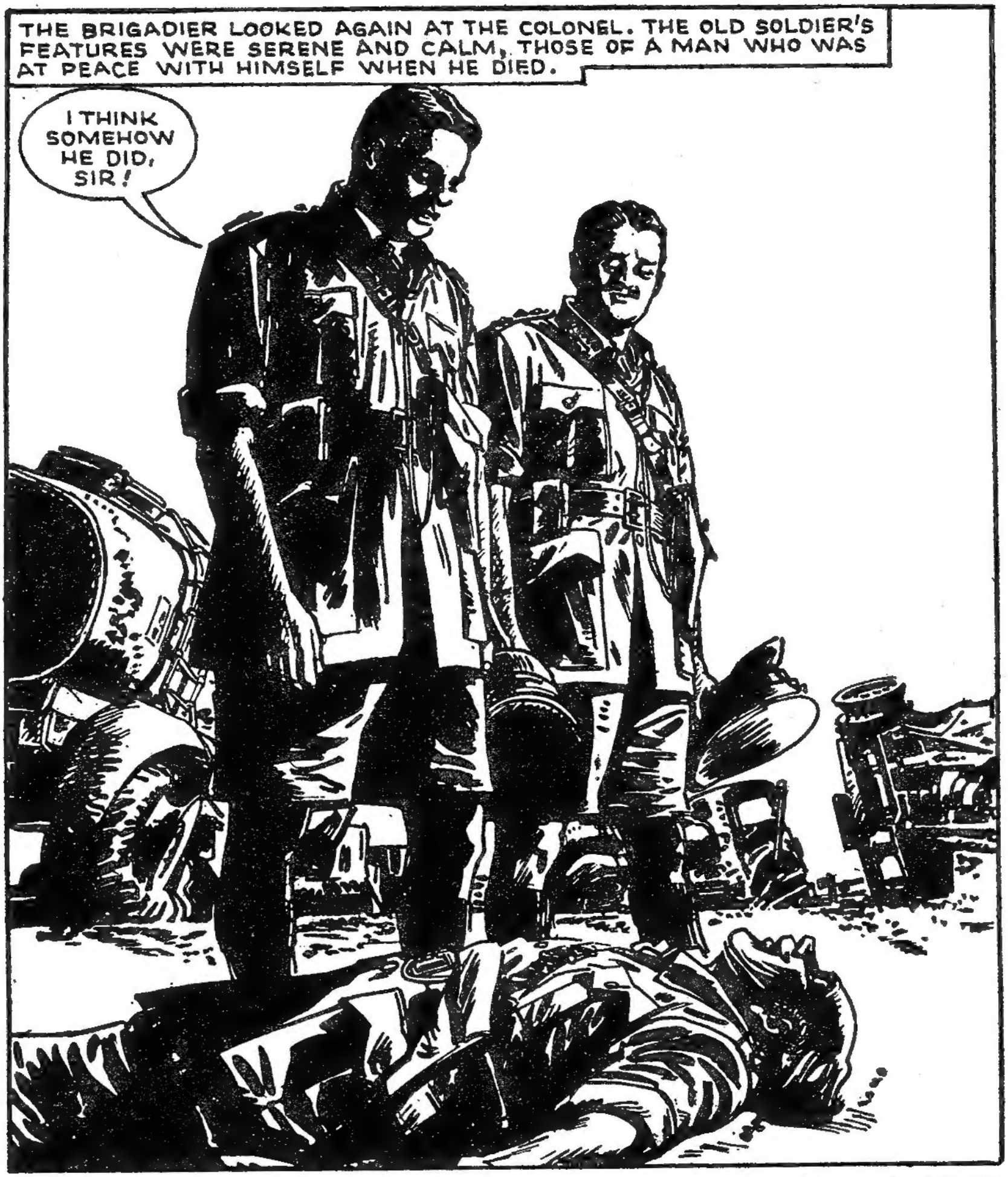
SERGEANT RAFFETY AND THE MEN OF THE FOURTH WHO HAD MARCHED ONLY ONE WAY ALONG THE MENIN ROAD...


THROUGH THE LONG HOURS OF THAT NIGHT, THE NAZI PANZER REGIMENT WAITED FOR FUEL AND AMMUNITION TO COME UP. IT WAS JUST ON DAWN WHEN THEY LEARNED IT WOULD NEVER COME.
OUR SUPPLY COLUMN HAS BEEN WIPED OUT, HERR OBERST.
THEN FOR US IT IS THE END, GENTLEMEN...
23

TWO HOURS LATER, A STARTLED BRITISH MAJOR ACCEPTED THE FORMAL SURRENDER OF AN ENTIRE GERMAN REGIMENT.
IF OUR SUPPLIES OF FUEL AND AMMUNITION HAD GOT THROUGH IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A VERY DIFFERENT STORY, HERR MAJOR.
POSSIBLY, COLONEL— POSSIBLY...
4


THE LAST OF THE GERMAN TANK MEN WERE SHUFFLING INTO CAPTIVITY WHEN THE G.O.C. AND BRIGADIER GREYLAND PASSED THAT WAY. BEHIND THEM THE COAST ROAD TO TOBRUK WAS STILL OPEN, THE ARMY STILL FALLING BACK IN GOOD ORDER.
KEEP MOVING, FRITZ. YOU'VE HAD YOUR WAR, MATE!
GREAT SCOTT! HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?
WE'LL SOON FIND OUT, GREYLAND.

THE MORNING WAS WELL ADVANCED WHEN THEY REACHED THE BIR SERNA DEPRESSION. THE SILENT FIGURES AND THE BURNT-OUT VEHICLES TOLD AN ELOQUENT STORY.
SO CLIVE HAS REACHED THE END OF THE ROAD. A PITY HE NEVER KNEW THE SERVICE THAT HE RENDERED TO THE DESERT ARMY.

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